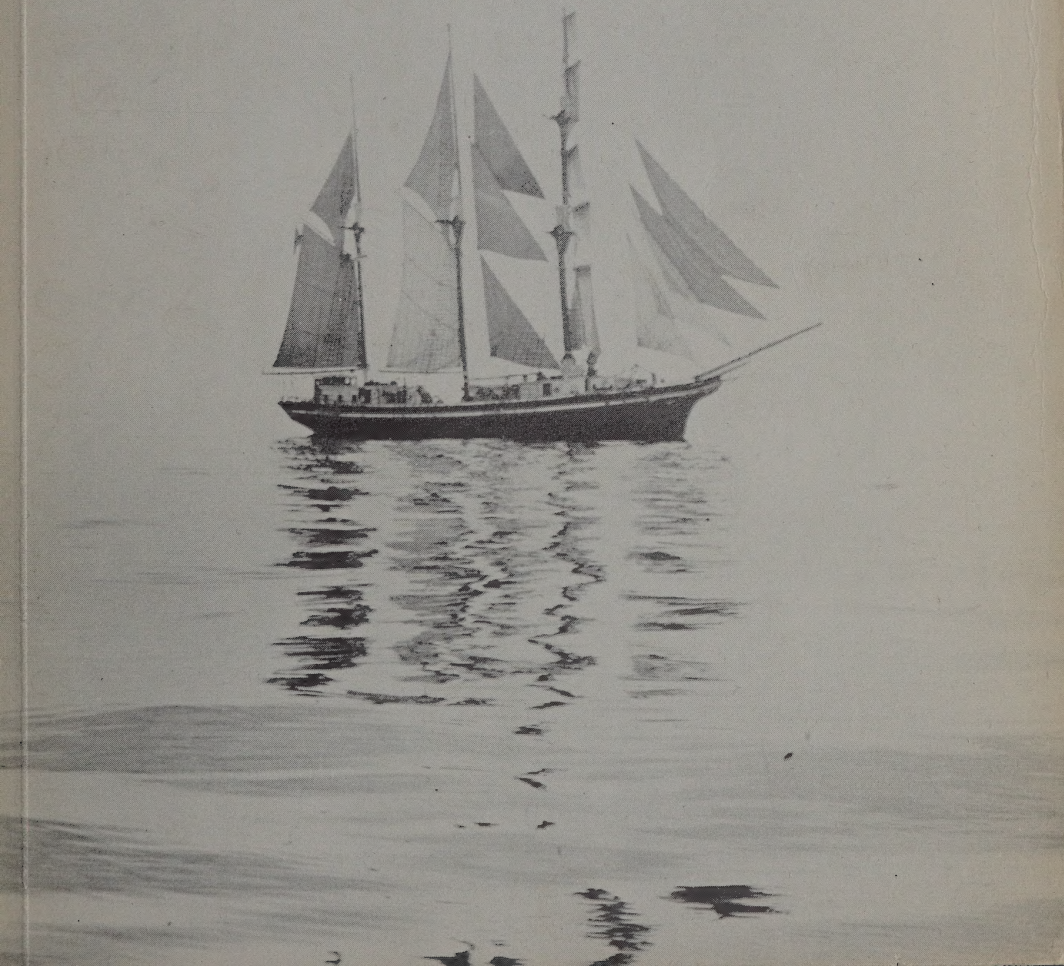
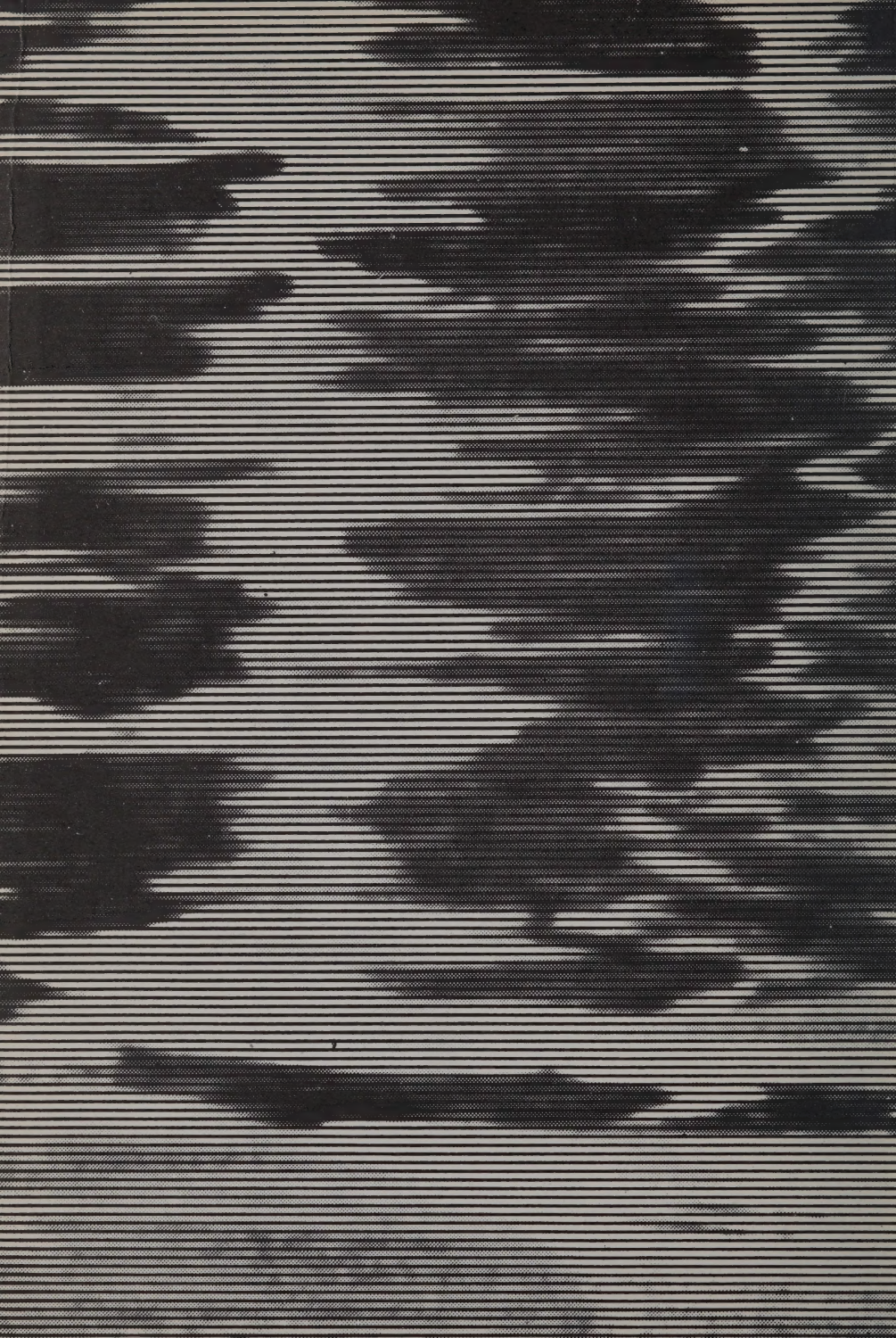
A CHANGE OF TACK

MAKING THE SHADOW LINE

Boleslaw Sulik





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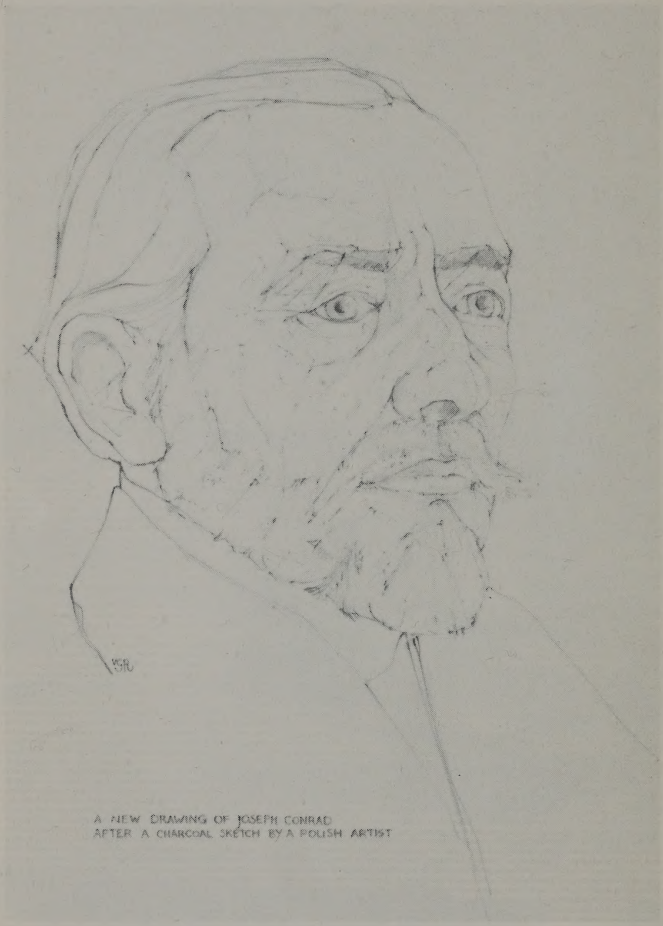

A NEW DRAWING OF JOSEPH CONRAD
AFTER A CHARCOAL SKETCH BY A POLISH ARTIST

A CHANGE OF TACK

MAKING THE SHADOW LINE

Boleslaw Sulik

1976

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NEW YORK ZOETROPE
31 EAST 12th / NEW YORK 10003

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Stills are reproduced by courtesy of Thames Television (from *The Shadow Line*) and Renata Pajchel (all others)

Designed by John Brookesmith & Ralph Murray

Printed by Centurion Print of Hertford

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Prologue

First, let me introduce myself. I was born a Pole, and settled in this country after the war, at seventeen. It was then that I heard English spoken for the first time. Years passed before I picked up even a rudimentary knowledge of the language. I have found English culture attractive, but I have kept up and developed my Polish ties, writing bilingually, trying to exist in both worlds at once. Giving up film criticism – as I did some years ago – in an attempt to enter what is known as the 'creative' side of film-making has somehow plunged me still deeper into that cultural duality. Free to follow my natural interests and responses I find that they lead me, more often than not, into areas where my peculiar situation becomes directly relevant.

Thus there is no need to explain how my interest in Joseph Conrad – a great English writer who was born a Pole – originated. In the imposing volume of critical and biographical work on Conrad there is, as far as I know, one pronounced gap: there is no study of how far Conrad's perceptions of life are those of an immigrant striving to put down roots in a strange culture. A lot of critical interest has been directed at his Polish background and the influence in his work of the Polish literary tradition, but it seems to stop short of considering the many stresses of an émigré's condition as another factor instrumental in shaping Conrad's creative outlook.

Joseph Conrad came into the world on 3rd December 1857 as Jozef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski, the only son of Apollo and Evelina. He was born in the little town of Berdyczow in the Podolia province of the Ukraine. His father came from an old and well-connected but impoverished Polish land-owning family. The Ukraine, now a republic of the Soviet Union, had formed, with Lithuania, a part of the federal Crown of Poland for four hundred years prior to the partitions of Poland late in the eighteenth century. The nobility and gentry of those eastern regions had become completely polonised, but culturally they had retained and developed certain very distinctive features of their own.

I believe, in fact, that a crucial cultural boundary ran, and still runs, across Poland, north to south, separating rationally and scientifically oriented Europeans from the emotionally extravagant White peoples of the East with their inherently religious attitude to existence. A clear awareness of belonging to a distinctly heterogeneous cultural formation, comprising some contradictory and even antagonistic features, is not uncommon among creative writers in Poland, and more particularly among those who were born and grew up in the Eastern territories.

In the nineteenth century, with Poland deprived of her statehood and most of her former territories occupied and administered by Imperial Russia, an extremely powerful Romantic movement sprang up in the Polish creative arts. National identity was affirmed through the most intense and exalted poetic imagery. Significantly, Poles from the Eastern, ethnically non-Polish regions (Mickiewicz, Slowacki, Krasinski, etc.) spearheaded the movement, with uniquely free literary

creations inhabited by live people, dead heroes, Gods, spirits and devils confronting one another on the same level of reality.

Apollo Korzeniowski, Conrad's father, was himself a literary man, a translator of Shakespeare and Victor Hugo and a dramatist of modest but quite real achievement. He was also unpractical, a poor bread-winner and a hot-headed patriot – in common with many of his Polish contemporaries. When Conrad was only three (his parents called him not by his first name of Joseph but Konrad – the main character in *Forefathers*, the famous Romantic verse drama by Mickiewicz), his father moved the family to Warsaw – the centre of both literary and political life. Their arrival coincided with the rising anti-Russian ferment, and Apollo plunged deep into the underground activities of the so-called 'red' revolutionary faction; activities which later culminated in the abortive Polish insurrection of 1863. Apollo, however, was arrested in October 1861 and, after a quick Warsaw trial, sentenced to exile in the remote, Northern Russian province of Vologda. His wife and child were allowed to accompany him.

It was a traumatic childhood. Conrad was lonely, sickly, prone to epileptic fits. His mother developed tuberculosis and died in exile in 1865. Curiously, Conrad in his writings left no clear recorded memories of the actual Russian exile, but there is a single image of the departure from his uncle's Ukrainian manor after a brief visit his mother was allowed. By that time she was already desperately ill, but the Russian Governor-General of the province refused her application to stay on with the family, ordering her back, under escort, to a prison hospital in Kiev. The family group gathered on the steps to bid their good-byes in haughty silence, with only the French governess, the outsider, uninhibited by the presence of a Russian escort:

'The elongated, bizarre, shabby travelling-carriage with four post-horses, standing before the long front of the house with its eight columns, four on each side of the broad flight of stairs. On the steps, groups of servants, a few relations, one or two friends from the nearest neighbourhood, a perfect silence, on all the faces an air of sober concentration, my grandmother all in black gazing stoically, my uncle giving his arm to my mother down to the carriage in which I had been placed already; at the top of the flight my little cousin in a short skirt of a tartan pattern with a deal of red in it, and like a small princess attended by the women of her own household: the head 'gouvernante', our dear, corpulent Francesca (who had been for thirty years in the service of the B. family), the former nurse, now outdoor attendant, a handsome peasant face wearing a compassionate expression, and the good, ugly Mlle. Durand, the governess, with her black eyebrows meeting over a short, thick nose, and a complexion like pale brown paper. Of all the eyes turned towards the carriage, her good-natured eyes only were dropping tears, and it was her sobbing voice alone that broke the silence with an appeal to me: "N'oublie pas ton français, mon chéri". . . . In the distance, half way down to the great gates, a light, open trap, harnessed with three horses in Russian fashion, stood drawn up on one side with the police captain of the district sitting in it, the vizor of his flat cap with a red band pulled down over his eyes.'*

* Joseph Conrad *A Personal Record*, pp. 64-65 (J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., London, 1946).

After the death of his mother little Conrad continued to share his father's exile. The health of both Apollo and his son got progressively worse and Conrad spent some time recovering with his mother's family. In 1868 Apollo Korzeniowski finally obtained his release, on condition that he left the Russian occupied territories. He moved with Conrad to Cracow, in the southern part of Poland under the more liberal Austrian administration, where a fairly free intellectual and even some open Polish political life was allowed. But Apollo's health was past regeneration and he died in a matter of months, in May of 1869. If we are to believe Conrad's own account (uncorroborated by any later evidence) his father's last act was to order the burning of all his manuscripts. ' . . . I happened to go into his room a little earlier than usual that evening, and remaining unnoticed stayed to watch the nursing sister feeding the blaze in the fireplace. My father sat in a deep armchair propped up with pillows. This is the last time I saw him out of bed. His aspect was to me not so much that of a man desperately ill, as mortally weary – a vanquished man.'†

The twelve year old orphan was left in the care of Tadeusz Borowski, his uncle on the mother's side, a sensible and practical man, devoted to his family. It proved an awkward and demanding duty to discharge. Apparently Conrad grew into an arrogant and obstinate teenager, and his educational progress in Cracow and in Lvov was intermittent at best. He left Poland for France in October of 1874, at the age of seventeen, without finishing his secondary education.

There are fairly numerous references in Joseph Conrad's writings to his departure from Poland and the curious choice – for a Pole with his background – of seafaring as a profession. He claims that at the tender age of nine he once stuck his finger at a map of Africa – at the blank space in the region of Stanley Falls in Congo – and said, 'with absolute assurance and an amazing audacity which are no longer in my character now: "When I grow up I shall go there." '‡ His stubborn early resolution to become a sailor worried his practical uncle and met with stiff opposition from almost every quarter. But Conrad never flinched and in the end Tadeusz Borowski acceded to what seemed his nephew's wholly irrational, amazing request. Furnished with some money, letters of introduction to some emigrant Poles and his guardian's reluctant blessings, Conrad arrived in Marseilles.

Some modern biographers of Conrad question the validity of this account, believing it to be a romantic, after-the-event misrepresentation of the real position. In their version there were perfectly rational and practical motives for Conrad's departure from Poland: in Russian law Conrad, as the son of a political convict, was liable to be drafted for life into military service. His guardian may have preferred to remove him, for his own protection, as far as possible from the frontiers of the Russian empire. After all it was not uncommon among the young Poles with Conrad's kind of background to spend some time in Western Europe. And on the Mediterranean coast the young man may have drifted into sailing by accident rather than design.

Such 'realistic' reading of the circumstances of Conrad's youth may well contain more than a grain of truth, but is not particularly revealing.

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† ibid, author's note, p. 8.

‡ ibid, p. 13.

The important thing, especially when dealing with the life of a great imaginative writer, is what he has made of the accidents of his life. In Conrad's subjective, emotional recollection, his departure from Poland appears as a headlong flight from the miseries of his childhood, and, on another level, from the self-denying, sacrificial patriotic ethos which had consumed the lives of his mother and his father and had threatened to absorb his own. He failed to join in the political and literary activities of the other Polish émigrés in Western Europe (some of the greatest works of the Polish Romantic movement had in fact been written in the West, mostly in France), and he chose to pursue during the rest of his life, with reckless stubbornness, two occupations as remote as could be from the traditional realities of his home: first sailing, and then writing creative fiction in English, which he only started to learn at the age of twenty-one.

It is even easier to debunk Conrad's attempts to show the origins of his love for England as an act of romantic will, unerring in its intuition. There is a touchingly absurd account of his first encounter, at the age of fifteen, with a real-life Englishman. It happened in the Swiss Alps on top of the Furca Pass during Conrad's first short trip to Western Europe, in the company of a young tutor whose real brief – so Conrad claims – was to talk the boy out of his ridiculous obsession with the sea. Having left a hostel in the valley they climbed the Furca Pass and set down to rest by the side of the road, the tutor picking up again his endless train of arguments against going to sea. Conrad listened with his '. . . eyes fixed obstinately on the ground. A stir on the road made me look up – and then I saw my unforgettable Englishman. . . . He marched rapidly towards the east with the mien of an ardent and fearless traveller. He was clad in a knickerbocker suit, but at the same time he wore short socks under his laced boots, for reasons which, whether hygienic or conscientious, were surely imaginative; his calves, exposed to the public gaze and to the tonic air of high altitudes, dazzled the beholder by the splendour of their marble-like condition and their rich tone of young ivory. He was the leader of a small caravan. The light of a headlong, exalted satisfaction with the world of men and the scenery of mountains illuminated his clean-cut, very red face, his short, silver-white whiskers, his innocently eager and triumphant eyes. In passing he cast a glance of kindly curiosity and a friendly gleam of big, sound, shiny teeth towards the man and the boy sitting like dusty tramps by the roadside, with a modest knapsack lying at their feet. . . . I tell you it was a memorable year! One does not meet such an Englishman twice in a lifetime. Was he in the mystic ordering of common events the ambassador of my future . . . ?'§

In 1878 Conrad joined his first British ship – the steamer *Mavis* – apparently because the Russian consul in Marseilles had been able to block his attempts to gain a commission with the French Navy. But Conrad claimed that it had always been his intention to serve in the British Merchant Navy. He was even more insistent that his choice of English as the medium of literary expression (it was, after Polish and French, his third language) was a matter of a sure intuition rather than a deliberate, rational decision. '. . . My faculty to write in English is as natural as any other aptitude with which I might have been born. I have

§ ibid, pp. 40-41.

a strange and overpowering feeling that it had always been an inherent part of myself. English was for me neither a matter of choice, nor adoption. The merest idea of choice had never entered my head. And as to adoption – well, yes, there was adoption; but it was I who was adopted by the genius of the language . . .'[11].

Twenty nine volumes of magnificent English prose testify to the intensity of this unique love-affair. There is no need of any other proof of the authenticity of Conrad's affection for England. But the course of this love couldn't have been smooth. To become English, when you are not, must rank among the most hopeless tasks of all time. No doubt, the more furiously Conrad worked at it, the greater his sense of isolation became.

Immigrants either stay within their closed communities and closed family units, drawing a lot of cosy comfort from them, or, cutting off their native ties, they become propelled into most extreme, radical, adventurous positions. As a writer, Conrad, with his aristocratic Polish manners and halting, often mispronounced spoken English, set up an English family with his plain, homely, very middle-class English Jessie. He rarely left England and moved, almost exclusively, among English acquaintances. Perhaps only another immigrant can fully comprehend the long-term emotional effects of such a situation. Life around you tends to look like a closed ritual, which you witness but do not really participate in. Even in familiar company you get things subtly wrong, you mistime slightly your conventional responses. You may withdraw, or cover your inhibitions with a show of arrogance; either way, you remain alone.

In Conrad's writing the almost existentialist isolation of his heroes (half a century before existentialism) in a world of powerful, amoral elements can be referred back to his cultural isolation in England. Another tension present in his imaginative creations is his attitude to Poland. Early in the century, with some of the early Conrad stories already translated into Polish, Elisa Orzeszkowa, a leading Polish woman novelist, made an attack on Conrad, calling him a renegade who had offered his considerable talents to a foreign culture. Conrad was deeply hurt, and for a time cut off his remaining individual Polish contacts. But the outbreak of World War I found him and his English family stranded in Cracow. Back in England he involved himself in political activity on behalf of Poland, submitting in 1916 to the Foreign Office 'A note on the Polish problem', with proposals for a limited Polish sovereignty.

Czeslaw Milosz, an eminent Polish émigré writer, believes there is a simple key to Conrad's *Lord Jim: Patna*, the ship which is supposedly going down, stands for 'Patria', or Poland; Conrad is Lord Jim, the officer who leaves the ship prematurely, while others stay on, and then spends the rest of his life trying to reclaim his lost honour. Such speculations may be literally true or not, but there is no doubt that Conrad's emotionally complex attitude to Poland remained a live and open issue till his death in England in 1924.

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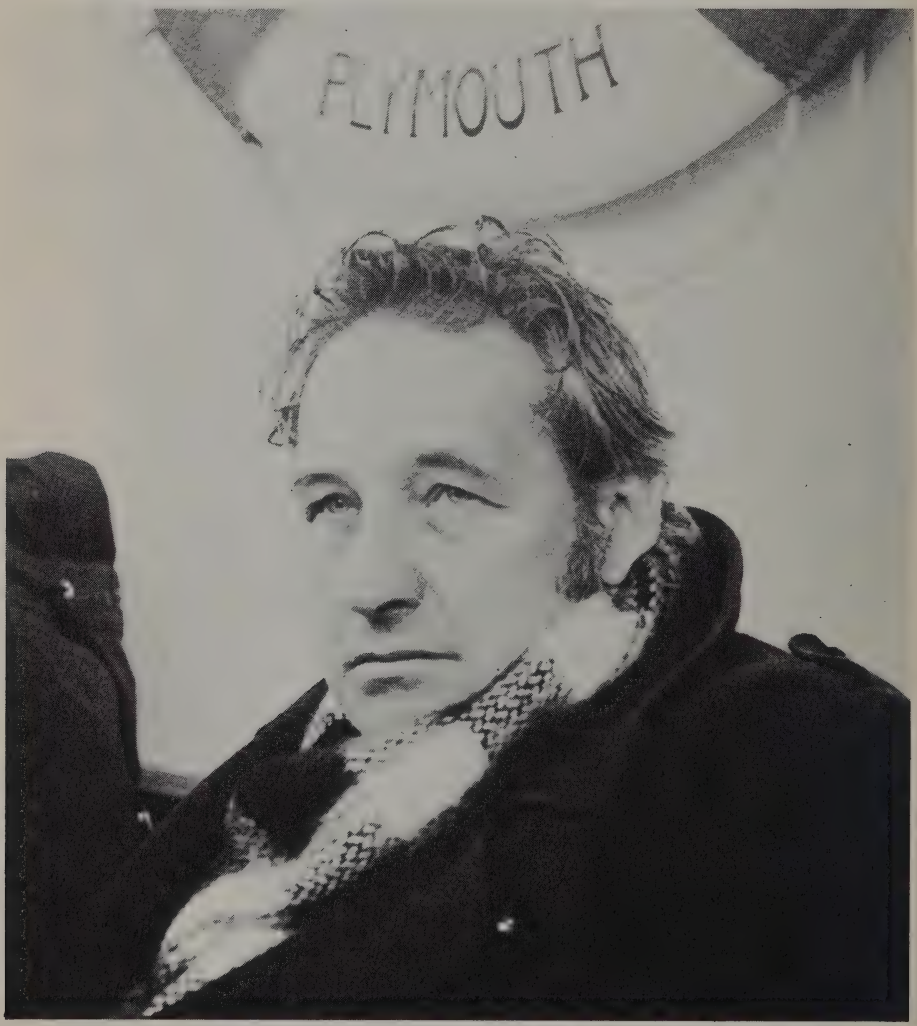
[11] ibid, author's note, p. 5.

CHAPTER I

Romantics and Bureaucrats

I met Andrzej Wajda for the first time in Warsaw, in the autumn of 1965. It was my first visit to Poland after nineteen years absence. A British friend – Paddy Whannel, then the Education Officer of the



Andrzej Wajda

British Film Institute – came along. Paddy, a Scottish romantic and a firm socialist from childhood, somewhat disillusioned by the practical effects of post-war socialist politics and hungry for emotional reassurance, had responded to Andrzej Wajda's early films, particularly *A Generation*, with intense emotional commitment. He was keen to meet the director. Warsaw friends offered to arrange it, at a small dinner party in their flat. Andrzej Wajda came with Beata Tyszkiewicz, the film actress, his wife at that time. The place, in a new housing estate, was a fairly typical Warsaw intellectual's pad (the host was a lecturer in philosophy): small, stuffy, crammed with books, conducive to intimacy. But Wajda managed to put miles between us. He ignored Paddy studiously and conceded the stage to Beata – a striking, opulent blonde, with delicate features, flashing teeth and an aggressively loud, booming laugh. Paddy strove to break through with a series of cinéaste questions, interpreted by me, and Wajda answered courteously enough, but only to me, and in defensively conventional terms. The host repeated some, in the Polish context, politically outrageous point I had made to him earlier about *Ashes*, Wajda's most recent film. Andrzej listened thoughtfully: 'That would do me no good', he finally said, by way of a reply.

Paddy came out crushed. In truth, the main reason for his Polish trip had been to spend that evening with Wajda, and throughout it he never even succeeded in meeting Wajda's eyes. Yet one could easily draw from this single scene the wrong conclusions. Certainly in direct contacts Wajda is most elusive, shifting, switching on and off in a disconcerting manner. The next time they met, in London, Wajda greeted Paddy like an old friend. He can transmit an intimate warmth, and then it evaporates suddenly and Wajda's attention wanders off. Also, in a country where a modern publicity machine does not exist, Wajda is very aware of the image he wants to project. But often, having brought certain social ways and postures to a fine perfection, he seems to lose interest in this particular image of himself and starts experimenting with another. To this extent he may be said to have an actor's pliable disposition, but with little of actors' vulnerable vanity and none at all of their submissive anxiety to please. With Wajda, such posturising is more of an art for art's sake, sometimes performed with aristocratically haughty air.

His Polish detractors – and there are many – claim this to be the behaviour of a cold and calculating man. But this is unfair. Wajda is most emphatically not one of those devious and greedy cannibals who feed off feature film-making, East and West. Of course, film direction is largely about the ability to exploit other people's talents, and Wajda possesses this ability to a high degree, complete with the indispensable ruthless streak. But, when prompted, he gives credit generously, where credit is due. The impression he gives is that he concedes the need to be forthcoming, sociable, a sparkling conversationalist, but he gets jealous of the energy he expends on it. The forces that really motivate him, that can trigger off his energies in full, lie elsewhere. It is the work that concentrates him and makes him a coherent person. One senses that his ambitions for high achievement in his work can reach a neurotic pitch. Underneath his very civilised manner he is rather like a top athlete, obsessed with breaking records, needing to test himself again and again, to prove that he is the best.

For years before my involvement in the Conrad project began I had been meeting this selfless egotist in Warsaw and in London, first as a critic with a particular interest in his work, then as a friend (though I've hesitated slightly over the use of this word, with its indications – especially when translated into Polish – of a firmly reciprocal, intimate relationship), and, generally, as 'his man in London'. There was the time in 1966 in England, when Wajda was overseeing the editing of *Gates to Paradise* – without question, his saddest international failure. He had shot it on Yugoslav locations in English, on a slender budget and a ridiculously tight schedule, with Lionel Stander woefully miscast as a medieval monk leading a children's crusade to the Holy Land. I accompanied Wajda several times to the cutting rooms at Twickenham Studios. He knew that the material was too thin to make a worthwhile film. He had been away from Poland for nine months, feeling isolated and unhappy with himself, with tensions developing in his marriage with Beata, too restless to get down to the mundane business of learning English, itching to get back to some meaningful work. He retreated back to Poland, made the brilliant *Everything for Sale*, and reappeared in London two years later in connection with an earlier Conrad project. It was *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad's magnificent long short story set in the Congo, which David Selznick Jnr. was trying to set up as a sumptuous, multi-million dollar production (the blockbuster days seemed not yet over), with Andrzej Wajda in the director's chair. The screen adaptation was by Andrzej Zulawski, an IDHEC*-educated Pole, who had served a couple of times as Wajda's assistant in Poland (he has since directed features, both in Poland and in France). He was writing the script in flamboyant French prose which was then quickly and efficiently put into English by a self-effacing lady translator whose name I could never find out. Wajda came over to contribute the director's ideas, confiding them to me in Polish, and I typed them out in English – a simple, straightforward arrangement, as I have since found out. The screen-play was full of good things: the story of a wholesome white man who goes into the African interior and finds that he has left all the moral constraints behind ends grandly with a blasphemous Black Mass, complete with a crucifixion. And yet Wajda was increasingly reluctant to commit himself fully to the project. After the sad experience of *Gates of Paradise* the thought of travelling to a remote Congo location in charge of a huge English-speaking crew, with no one to communicate with in Polish and to bounce ideas off, clearly filled him with terror. So he retreated again into the familiar pressures of film making in Poland, to shoot *Landscape after the Battle*.

In Communist Poland Wajda's creative problems are essentially political, and impossible to translate into the commercial terms of film-making in the West. And the popular impact of Wajda's films in Poland has a definite political significance. In a system which does not provide for open political argument, aesthetic discussion often serves as counterfeit political debate. In Poland Wajda has offered profuse opportunities for an argument of this kind. A large part of his films and

* Institut des Hautes Etudes Cinématographiques; influential French film school.

stage productions are drawn from the Polish literary and dramatic classics, adapted boldly and on occasions somewhat irreverently, so that they regain their capacity to move, shock and disturb. It is impossible to sum up in a sentence Wajda's impressively prolific output, as ambitious as it is brilliantly eclectic, but a lot of it challenges, directly or indirectly, the comfortable assertions of Polish nationalism. He loves to strip and expose old Polish wounds and he does it by drawing on the national iconography, emotionally most potent. Not surprisingly his work stirs strong feelings, helps to polarise attitudes and – thanks to a curious tendency of critics in the communist countries to confuse form with content – sets off a chain of fiery, if sometimes incoherent, arguments. I must refrain from plunging here into the impenetrable complexities of the Polish soul, but, briefly, Wajda, the inveterate romantic, provokes the narrow nationalists to anger (the fact that he has become an international cult figure gives another edge to their displeasure), and his most fervent support comes from a part of the liberal intelligentia.†

In the past Wajda has given voice to his impatience with this situation, finding it creatively restrictive. He would, no doubt, be glad to move into a world with a range of wider references, and to find an audience with less predictable responses. In a word, he would enjoy scoring a success with a large international public – not just, as at present, with a discriminating international minority. But he feels that his temperament, if not his skills, does not travel well. He enjoys a challenge, but not when he has to work in an unfamiliar context, where lack of easy communication inhibits his preference for improvisation, for inspired last-minute on the set decisions, for sailing very close to the wind. So he chooses to stay on in Poland where at least he understands the risks he is taking.

Andrzej Wajda is not a member of the ruling Communist (Polish United Workers) Party, and he professes to be ignorant of the nature of the petty squabbling and jockeying for positions that seem to be constantly going on inside the ruling élite in Poland and which result in the incessant shifts in the Party's cultural policy. One of the facts of life in the Communist bureaucracies of Eastern Europe is that personal advancement depends largely on being in with the right set of people at the right time. And yet Wajda, assuming haughty disregard for the rules of this game, cultivating the air of a snobby outsider, manages not only to survive but to flourish inside the system. In 1968, when political tensions in Poland triggered off first the student riots and then the 'anti-Zionist' counter-blast from the Party and an orgy of officially-inspired spurious nationalistic sentiment, Wajda was calmly preparing to shoot *Landscape after the Battle*, a ruthlessly unsentimental Auschwitz story with a life-affirming erotic episode involving a Jewish girl. And when the political uproar subsided, Wajda emerged stronger than ever, having been offered a production unit of his own inside the newly refurbished structure of the Polish film industry.

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† It seems incredible that some Western reviewers have managed to find supposedly anti-semitic accents in Wajda's recent *Land of Promise* (1976). In Poland some red nationalists thought the film pro-Jewish and un-patriotic.

Poland currently produces around 25 feature films annually, with plans to raise the output to 35 over the next five years. This does not include the fast growing television network, partly fed by the feature industry, or the traditionally large output of documentary films, for theatrical as well as television distribution. Since 1956 the structure of the feature industry has been based on a system of semi-independent producers' cooperatives, known as 'Film Authors' Units'. With notable film makers in charge these production units were supposed to develop separate artistic programmes, attracting individual directors sympathetic to the unit's aims. In the sixties, when political controls were being tightened again, Party bureaucrats were called in to lead and administer the units, but with production stifled, another reform in 1969 went back to a modified version of the original system. Currently there are eight such production units in existence. Each is headed by an Artistic Director – usually a distinguished film director – assisted by a Literary Director in charge of scripts, and a permanent Production Manager for the unit. There are also several individual directors on a retainer fee, when they are not working on their own projects. A unit is allocated annually sufficient funds to commission or buy film treatments and to cover its administrative costs. A script backed by the unit is submitted for approval to a Deputy Minister of Culture and Arts with special responsibilities for the cinema, who considers with his advisers whether to accept the project or reject it. Once the script goes through, the unit's production manager can cost the film and submit the budget through the office acting for all the Film Authors' Units. With the budget approved, the state bank credits the money to the unit and the project goes into production.

Andrzej Wajda is the Artistic Director of 'Unit X'. It was a late appointment, in view of his great international reputation, but having got it Wajda at once started laying plans with what seemed a total disregard for the realities of life in the Polish cinema. The feature film industry in Poland is top-heavy, carrying too many directors of mediocre skills. The State Film School in Lodz, where Wajda, and Munk, Polanski, Skolimowski, Kutz, Has, Zanussi and almost all the other notable Polish directors once studied, keeps turning out graduate film makers, and the socialist economy in principle guarantees them employment. But the cruel truth is that at least half of the practising film directors have failed to prove their artistic or commercial worth, and the industry would have been much better without them. As it is, under-financed studios and the popularity, with the general public and political administrators alike, of expensive historical costume pieces create a bottle-neck and drag production targets down. Typically, Wajda in his unit proposed to deal with this problem by totally ignoring it. Instead, he developed grand plans for inviting the cream of talent from other socialist countries – Tarkowski from the Soviet Union, Jancso from Hungary, Menzel and others from Czechoslovakia – to make films for 'Unit X'. He also wanted to open the unit to the most brilliant practitioners in the Polish theatre: Grotowski, Konrad Swiniarski, Tomaszewski, encouraging them to try their hand at film making.

It was too radical a scheme to succeed. A co-production with Hungary, to be directed by Jancso, faltered on the brink. More seriously, several scripts on contemporary social themes, including a couple which

Wajda wanted to do himself, got stuck at the ministry. (The current political practice is to shelve projects rather than reject them out of hand. 'Not now, it's not the right time for it' is the more likely answer than a cold 'no'.) Disillusioned with his first taste of being a producer for other people, Wajda got down to make *The Land of Promise* – another big literary adaptation and, when it came out, the first huge success for 'Unit X'. Somehow, a corner was turned with this production. A new Literary Director was appointed in Boleslaw Michalek, a leading critic and writer on the cinema, and a most civilised man, fluent in several European languages. He proved to be a very able script editor and negotiator, sympathetic to Wajda's way of thinking and complementing him in an important way. The unit took under its wing several young film makers of genuine promise, and Wajda's old, grand designs seemed to be making a modest come-back. Bad luck had still not entirely worked itself out: Konrad Swiniarski, the great Cracow stage director, was about to make his debut as a film director for 'Unit X' when he was killed in a plane crash; and a Conrad project, later to become *The Shadow Line*, was making a tortuously slow and difficult progress.

I first heard about the Conrad project early in 1973. Andrzej Braun, a Polish novelist and a Conrad scholar, came upon *At Sea with Joseph Conrad* by Captain J. G. Sutherland – a slim, little-known English volume, published in 1922 in a limited edition. In November 1916, at the height of the German U-boat offensive, Joseph Conrad, then nearing sixty and in poor health, spent a fortnight on board *HMS Ready*, a Q-boat carrying disguised arms and hunting the North Sea for German submarines. The book is an engagingly wide-eyed, naïvely admiring account of those two weeks at sea with the great writer, told by the Captain of *HMS Ready*. Andrzej Braun suggested to Wajda that the story could provide a basis for a film about Joseph Conrad, to coincide with the fiftieth anniversary of the writer's death. In the politics of the Polish cinema, famous anniversaries always provide a useful peg to hang costly film projects on, so Wajda commissioned a treatment from Braun. The volume was not available in Poland, and as 'Wajda's man in London' I was asked to photo-copy the hundred odd pages and send it over.

Several months later in Warsaw Wajda gave me the finished treatment to read and comment upon. I have not met Mr. Braun to this day. There is no doubt that he is an accomplished writer and a man who knows and loves Conrad's work. He even managed, a few years before this project, to follow Conrad to the Far East, explore the old sailing routes and visit places which appear, often somewhat disguised, in Conrad's Eastern novels. A lively Polish book, *In Conrad's Footsteps*, grew out of that adventure. But the treatment commissioned by 'Unit X', *The Last Berth*, was Andrzej Braun's first work for the screen. I found it cinematically unpromising. For long stretches nothing much happens on board the Q-boat in the North Sea, and old Conrad, enveloped in the crew's adulations, gazing at the cold sea, lapses into sentimental reminiscing on the characters he has brought to life in his famous stories. In front of his eyes – and ours – materialise, in turn, Ransome – the cook from *The Shadow Line*, Wait from *The Nigger of the Narcissus*, and the ravishing heroine of *Freya of the Seven Isles*. It seemed to me a curiously anachronistic hotch-potch of refined literary

tastes coarsely sentimentalised to bring it down to the level of the cheap market-place of the popular art of the cinema. And it was making the wrong assumptions about stock British responses to an exotic figure like Conrad, and about the old writer's personal outlook and temperament.

Apparently my criticisms confirmed Wajda's own feelings about *The Last Berth*. He asked me to have a go at a treatment, starting from scratch, of the same North Sea episode in Conrad's life. I received only two general directives: that it should be structured like one of Conrad's own stories, a serious pastiche; and that I should write it in English. Wajda, though by no means certain that it would make a fit subject for him to direct, was adamant from the start that he would not be associated with a purely Polish film about Conrad. It would inevitably become, in his view, a vain, narrowly parochial image of a great international writer unless it was addressed to an international audience, shot in English, with British actors, and therefore with British participation in the production. I was asked to start looking in London for a likely co-producer.

CHAPTER II

Second Wind

In the autumn of 1973 I got down to serious work on the Conrad script. I had consumed a large chunk of the huge Conrad bibliography, getting a number of speculative insights into the writer's outlook and character, but failing to find any additional source material for the action of the projected film. Conrad's North Sea escapade in November of 1916 is mentioned by him, by his son Borys and in a couple of biographies, but the only extended report on it is to be found in the pages of Capt. Sutherland's *At Sea with Joseph Conrad*. Such a limited source can be advantageous in that it gives the writer freedom to amplify and invent.

By the outset of the First World War Joseph Conrad had managed at long last to make the transition from being a writer highly praised by a select group of critics but without a wider reading public, to a fairly popular novelist. It was *Chance*, published in 1913 and now judged to be one of Conrad's inferior novels, which turned out to be his first commercial success and smoothed the way for new editions of the earlier masterpieces. For the first time since he had become a professional writer, a steady flow of royalties enabled him to clear off his debts and to plan his material existence in a more relaxed way. One of the ways in which he used this new freedom was to accept an invitation from a Polish friend to take his invalid wife, Jessie, and his sons, Borys and John, for a visit to see the Old Country.

The Conrads arrived in Cracow on the last day of July 1914, a few days after the Sarajevo assassination and two days after Austria declared war on Serbia. Before they could cross into the Russian-held part of Poland, Russia joined the war and the frontier became live. Wise men in the Polish city of Cracow tried to draw Conrad – a Pole who had made good in powerful Britain – into late night councils about patriotic obligations at this new juncture, when three occupying powers were fighting one another on Polish soil, drafting young Poles into the opposing armies. But Conrad was getting panicky about the predicament of his innocent English family, stranded with their British passports deep in the enemy camp. He took them to a mountain retreat in the High Tatras, and after two months of trials they managed to make their getaway by way of Vienna and Italy.

No doubt this experience, followed by others, shook Conrad out of any tendency to sit back complacently on his recently won success. His elder son, Borys, volunteered for service at seventeen, fought in Flanders and was seriously wounded. Conrad himself spent the rest of the war in Britain, writing little, (*The Shadow Line* is his only story completed during the war), busying himself occasionally with political activity on behalf of Poland, opening his house to a variety of foreign visitors. In 1916, with his son already in France, Conrad visited a number of naval establishments. Open access was granted to him by the Admiralty, in the apparent belief that he meant to write about the Merchant Service contribution to the war effort. Conrad spent two days in a mine sweeper,

flew in a Navy aircraft, and in November spent that highly risky but abortive fortnight on board of the Q-ship *HMS Ready*.

It is reasonable to surmise that for Conrad, with his moral sensibilities and restlessness, this was, once again, a challenging and critical time. He was in his late fifties, and in failing health. He had spent the previous twenty years turning the adventurous experiences of his youth into literature. As he said himself, he lacked the faculty to invent things; he could only shape and transform what he had known. So he had crystallised and refined his experience until his own life must have hardened for him into a contrivance. And then the old world order crashed, his son was staking his life for England, Conrad's adopted country, while Conrad's old country, Poland, was being ravaged by foreign armies. With his susceptible pride, his inherent sense of guilt, the perpetually open account with himself, Conrad must have felt that his personal stake in the conflict had to be real, not symbolic. Perhaps – as Wajda has suggested – that foolhardy North Sea escapade was made in search of a chivalrous death?

Taking the subjective, Conrad's, point of view, the story of his Q-boat expedition has to be seen as a story of failure, of thwarted hopes. It was certainly a military failure. Having sailed out of Granton *HMS Ready* made three U-boat sightings in the course of the fortnight's wandering, which took her close to the Danish coast: two on examination turned out to be British; the third, encountered on the way back home, really was German, but before there was time to do anything about it a squadron of British trawlers appeared and chased the Germans away. Thus the known facts suggested a suspense story without an issue, unresolved in terms of physical cinematic action.

Many other useful elements of suspense appeared to be present. According to Sutherland, *HMS Ready* was little more than a 'floating coffin', Q-boats were expendable, so a number of cheap and practically disused vessels had been acquired. After all, pirate ships had no need for a Lloyd's certificate of seaworthiness. *HMS Ready* was a wooden brigantine, slow and ungainly, built some time around the middle of the nineteenth century. After being fitted out hastily it continued to take in water, and when it ran into a storm the pumps had to be worked continuously. It kept the volunteer crew busy, taking their minds off endless waiting, day after day, for something to happen – as did the repeated battle drills. Q-boats, disguised as cargo vessels, sailed under a neutral, usually Scandinavian, flag. The Germans endeavoured to stop neutral shipping breaking their U-boat blockade of Britain, but faced with what they expected to be harmless, unarmed vessels, they allowed the crew to take to their life boats and then blasted the ship with a surface gun, rather than waste an expensive torpedo. On board the Q-ship the recommended procedure was to feign signs of panic, and to lower a boat for a part of the crew to row out hastily, distracting the Germans. Then, with the U-boat easily within range, the disguises would suddenly be pulled out exposing the hidden guns on the deck of the Q-ship, the British ensign (of course!) would be run up to replace the neutral flag, and the battle would commence. But in truth this was a pirate project, outside the normal rules of war, with every Q-boat captain free to improvise his own code of conduct.

The basic situation seemed to offer exciting cinematic opportunities, but Capt. Sutherland's account of his North Sea expedition was simply

too loose, uneventful and naïve to make a film by direct adaptation. His attitude to Conrad on board was apparently that of a starry-eyed fan, apt to ascribe and extol all sorts of conventional virtues in the old writer, but unable to observe sharply. Sutherland's slim volume carries a significant short preface by Joseph Conrad. He says, in effect, that when proofs of *At Sea with Joseph Conrad* arrived, he had been too ill to read them, and having recovered he thought it better not to, because every man has the right to his personal memories and impressions of an adventure he has lived through.

I find it quite impossible to believe that Conrad, who had his proper share of creative writer's vanity, could stop himself from reading a book about himself. His preface has to be understood as a diplomatic way of disowning Sutherland's account of the journey. It absolves one – if an absolution is needed – from an obligation to treat Sutherland's text as gospel truth.

Even so, I had to respect the basic facts of the expedition, as given by Sutherland. I could not, for instance, go into a grand fictional climax of a battle against a German U-boat. But I felt free to interpret the situation on board *HMS Ready* in my own way, and to look for cohesion in elements of psychological tension. During that initial, exploratory talk with Wajda we agreed that Conrad would make his North Sea journey incognito, his true identity known only to the Captain. This proved to be a useful point of departure. Imagine, on board the Q-ship, a strange, elderly gentleman with strikingly un-English features and speaking with a heavy foreign accent, but carrying himself in an exaggeratedly British fashion. The Captain plays up to him unashamedly, and nobody knows who he is. No doubt he would attract a lot of amused curiosity to start with, but when the expedition goes wrong, the crew – that band of volunteer adventurers – could easily turn against the stranger. Sailors are superstitious, and the odd outsider would seem the most likely jinx, the carrier of bad luck. The expedition goes wrong and Conrad is blamed for it – that was the proposition, reduced to simple terms.

This introduced a general and continuous theme perfectly comprehensible – I believed – to Poles and British alike. Almost from the start of the Conrad project I became uncomfortably aware that I was writing a film for a dual audience, with totally different cultural perceptions and expectations. On top of that the Polish state producers obviously supposed that the depth of Conrad's Polish roots would somehow be made clear to the Western audience. But how do you communicate Polishness to the British, in a film which is not about Poland? There are stock images and stock responses in the case of Russia, China or America, but no simple reference can evoke Poland in an average British viewer. The best I could hope for was to incorporate in the story about old Conrad short and sharp subjective flashback images that would immediately give Polish viewers a sense of emotional identification, while serving in Britain as poetic intimations of an exotic and rich, remote culture. The reverse perspective, evoking Britain for the Polish audience, seemed to me much less of a problem.

Obviously, it wasn't going to be an easy job, but I felt roused and hopeful. Playing with ideas and making random notes is always the most enjoyable and optimistic phase of screen-writing. I got down to working out a loose plot structure, point by point. Here it is, all fifty seven scenes of it, warts and all, in the original rough form.

1 Russian soldiers trying to befriend child – Conrad.
2 Conrad's mother scolds him.
3 Conrad runs away to a lake, climbs a tall tree overhanging water and jumps.

CREDITS over a frozen frame of falling Conrad.

Motto: 'He who starts on a deliberate quest of adventure goes forth but to gather dead-sea fruit . . . ' (*The Mirror of the Sea*).

4 Bowler-hatted old Conrad in a bi-plane, flying over the sea. Narrator introduces Conrad and himself.
5 After landing, Conrad thanks the youthful pilot.
6 Conrad at the Commodore's meets Sutherland, learns about the Q-boat and asks for permission to sail.
7 A glimpse of Conrad at home. Jessie and John. (Narration). A premonition of Borys's death. A telegram from Sutherland.
8 Conrad's embarcation on *HMS Ready*. First impressions and introductions.
9 Target practice and drills in Commodore's presence. Permission to sail.
10 Departure: first commands, sails, wind noises. Unlit British coast like 'savage Borneo'.
11 Conrad with map and navigation instruments.
12 FLASH-BACK: A flock of white geese in a Polish village, taking off. Geese flying into Borneo jungle.
13 Conrad, alone on deck, called to a 'war conference' in the cuddy, to invent a new name for the ship – it's *Freya* – and agree a procedure for this pirate brig.
14 Friendly chat at supper. White-clad cook. Drinking port.
15 Night activity on deck. Painting the new name and Norwegian colours, disguising guns.
16 Officers unable to sleep with Rampling tinkering with the motors underneath. Conrad suggests moving the sleeping quarters.
17 Conrad with Musgrove (the radio-telegraphist). German coded messages intercepted.
18 Conrad overhears a fo'c'sle argument about his presence aboard.
19 Wind rising up, developing into gale. Energetic activity on board.
20 Ship leaking. Pumping at midnight.
21 Night: Conrad, on upper bunk, reading by a paraffin lamp; Osborne, on the lower, wet, sprayed with water and swearing.
22 FLASH BACK: An expanse of snow on a vast plain. A sledge drawn by four horses, with old Conrad in it, his beard white with frost.
23 Wakes up fully dressed, pulling on wellingtons before stepping on waterlogged floor.
24 Conrad tending 'his' Gardner gun, and nailing back on disguises removed by the gale.
25 Conrad relieving a sailor at the wheel, sights a dan buoy and mistakes it for a U-boat.
26 A conference. No subs in the North Sea. Orders criticised, a change of course suggested. Conrad a wet blanket. A hint of enmity in Osborne.
27 Conrad's turn for individual washing in the cabin. He undresses.
28 FLASH BACK: A track up a tropical river, in a dense forest. A topless native beauty stands on a bank, staring into camera.

29 Conrad's ablutions interrupted by commotion on board; a sub has been sighted.
30 Preparations for battle. Conrad ordered to take charge of confidential records.
31 Sub identified as British. Disappointment.
32 A grim supper. Sutherland fails to cheer the company with the Jock Muir story. Osborne drinks, suggests a change of the ship's name might change her luck. Wind gets up again.
33 Conrad tries to relieve a sailor at the wheel and gets a brush off.
34 Conrad startles huge Rampling and tiny Musgrove, obviously talking about him. Rampling leaves at once and Musgrove admits that some of the crew consider Conrad brings bad luck. 'Nothing personal.' Conrad remains at the wireless, practising Morse code.
35 FLASH BACK: Conrad as child and his ill mother taken by police to Czernichow, uncle and friends watching.
36 A furious gale rises. Conrad on deck, trying to lend a hand, but his help is no longer welcomed.
37 A supper during gale. Cutlery and food constantly flying off the table with Heather (the Captain's boy-servant) diving under to retrieve it. A call comes that the pumps won't work.
38 Moodie mending pumps. All hands at work.
39 Conrad alone in the cabin full of sea-water.
40 FLASH BACK: Conrad as child reading aloud proofs of *Toilers of the Sea* to his father.
41 Back to sunshine and a steady breeze. Sombre moods.
42 Alert for another sub. It is identified as British once again.
43 Conrad a silent witness to an argument between Osborne and Sutherland about *Freya*. A wireless message is reported, ordering a change of course towards Grimsby.
44 Running before the wind in November sunshine. Conrad trying to hide an attack of gout. Aware of the crew's antipathy he is now seeking solitude, but is plagued by Sutherland's artificial heartiness.
45 A British bi-plane appears. It circles low over the ship and drops into sea. A boat is lowered and Conrad, greatly affected, forces his way into the rescue party.
46 They reach the plane and fish out the dead body of a young man.
47 FLASH BACK: Apollo Korzeniowski's funeral in Cracow. Crowds in the street, people looking down from open windows. 11 year-old Conrad following the coffin.
48 The pilot's body is being sewn up when another U-boat is sighted. Excitement turns to anger when smoke from British trawlers scares the sub away.
49 Trawlers appear, spread out and encircle *Freya*. A patrol, led by a highly suspicious officer, comes aboard.
50 Sutherland suggests, without prior warning, that Conrad be transferred to a trawler and put ashore. He objects at first, but soon gives in, seeing the generally hostile mood.
51 Sutherland arranges a formal farewell. After the Captain's pompous little speech Conrad shakes hands with everybody, and takes his place in the boat beside the sewn-up body of the pilot.

52 Ashore in Bridlington. Recruiting posters, Salvation Army band playing. Conrad is asking the way of a young girl, when two police officers approach him.
53 Conrad at the police station, explaining his landing and his foreign accent and rather upset by the incident.
54 Conrad alone in a train compartment.
55 FLASH BACK: On a tropical beach a couple – a man and a woman – walking away towards the sea. A half-naked Conrad-Almayer crawls into shot, filling the woman's footprints up with sand. Rising, he becomes Conrad, dressed in a suit. He is watching, across the beach, a ship setting red sails, far out in the bay.
56 Back to Conrad in a train, landscape of old industrial Britain moving past the window (Narration).
57 Conrad as boy falling into the lake. He breaks the surface and water closes above him.

I called the story *Second Wind*. I wrote the first draft – all 93 pages of typescript – with only minor adaptations to this plot structure. The opening pre-credit sequence of little Conrad in Russian exile was pure invention. A line of Cossack horsemen in a vast plain, a child – Conrad – playing outside a cottage. One of the Cossacks trots up to him, picks up the boy and places him astride the horse in front of the saddle. A wasted young woman – Evelina Korzeniowska, Conrad's mother – is watching grimly from the cottage window. When the boy comes in she turns furiously on him, shaming him for playing with the enemy soldiers, calling him a coward. At dusk Conrad runs away to a nearby lake – a borderless sheet of water, a rising mist veiling the far shore. He climbs a tall old elm, its branches overhanging the water. Conrad reaches one of the top branches, dangles from the end of it, and lets go. As he falls through the air his flight slows down, until the motion is arrested a moment before he is to enter the water.

I got rather fond of this little preface. I thought it was setting up quite well the theme of how Conrad's prickly honour and his proneness to irrational feelings of guilt had fed his reckless courage. The credits would end with this quote from *The Mirror of the Sea:* 'He who starts on a deliberate quest of adventure goes forth but to gather dead-sea fruit, unless, indeed, he be beloved of the gods and great among heroes, like that most excellent cavalier Don Quixote de la Mancha.'

After the credits I was going straight to 1916: to an elderly Conrad in the open cock-pit of a plane, his bowler hat held in place in the powerful air current by a silk scarf tied under the chin. A voice-off introduces him, as we are gazing into his doggy, slightly slanting eyes, now blazing with the excitement of the first flight:

> His name is Joseph Conrad Korzeniowski. He is
> a freak. First, a sailor from a country which
> knows no sea, then a writer in a foreign tongue.
> . . . He is fifty nine, and a war is on.

I felt that the Narrator device was of crucial importance. It was the only way I could conceive of giving the film an integral literary dimension. The Narrator was to be Conrad's alter ego. 'Solitude, like love, bears offspring in the parent's image,' he was going to say, intro-

ducing himself equivocally. I was trying to write a strongly rhetorical narration, but stopping short of imitating Conrad's own style. That, I believed, would have been too dangerous – except when a direct quote seemed appropriate, as when *HMS Ready* changes her name to *Freya*, a character in one of Conrad's stories. That passage was preceded by a scene of the officers' after-dinner discussion, with Conrad taking part as Mr Jones, a mysterious guest invited by the Admiralty to join the expedition. The name *Freya* of Bergen has been decided on.

HEATHER has set the glasses in front of the officers and OSBORNE (the First Officer) is pouring out generous quantities of port, shouting in his booming voice:

OSBORNE: The toast! The toast, gentlemen! It's unseemly to keep a lady waiting at her own christening!

SUTHERLAND: (*addressing Conrad*) Would you care to propose it? Be the Godfather to her, Mr Jones.

But CONRAD declines with a polite smile.

CONRAD: Surely it's the Captain's privilege, and his duty.

SUTHERLAND needs no persuading. He stands up, with all the others following.

SUTHERLAND: Gentlemen! We all expect the same thing from her. We expect *Freya* to be lucky.

MOODIE: Hear, hear!

SUTHERLAND: A lucky huntress, that is. A gentle British lady with a fancy foreign name, but with a deadly aim. A temptress, calling forth those steely German underwater monsters and then – wham!

OSBORNE: Boom! Boom!

SUTHERLAND: Gentlemen! To *Freya*!

They all, except HEATHER, carry glasses to their lips.

Later that night, after the ship's new name has been painted on, we cut to a distant view of her.

A long view of Freya from outside, her white sails full, gleaming in the moonlight. The NARRATOR's voice comes in.

NARRATOR (off): The oval of her face was perfect; and within that fascinating frame the most happy disposition of line and feature, with an admirable complexion, gave an impression of health, strength, and what I might call unconscious self-confidence – a most pleasant and, as it were, whimsical determination. . . . She dressed generally in a white frock, with a skirt of walking length, showing her neat, laced, brown boots. If there was any colour about her costume it was just a bit of blue perhaps. No exertion seemed to distress her.

Daylight breaks out suddenly. The brigantine, running before a strong wind, is seen from a similar angle . . . The NARRATOR continues in a sharper, more incisive tone of voice:

Freya has never been among his favourite creations. She was gushingly romantic and extravagantly second rate, a femme-fatale for stolid imaginations. An aborted act. A failure.

I tried to preserve a certain formality of tone in almost all the dialogue scenes on board. The attitudes towards Conrad are alienatingly formal even when they are fairly cordial at the beginning; they remain formal as they grow cool and, in the end, hostile. The one exception is Conrad's relationship to Heather, the boy servant. This character started to develop in the writing of the first draft. With him, Conrad manages to be warm and uninhibited, and the boy becomes his only true ally on the ship. He also brings to Conrad reports on the crew's feelings towards the mysterious stranger. Heather's presence adds another point to the flashbacks from Conrad's Polish childhood.

The passages of action were adapted from Sutherland's book. The one exception was the invented appearance of a bi-plane, which suddenly and incongruously drops out of the sky. The body of the adolescent pilot floating in the sea, as young as his son, Borys, or the pilot who took him up in a navy plane, brings on in Conrad an attack of irrational guilt-feelings, as if he really was responsible for every misfortune that befell the ship.

I finished writing my first draft late in the autumn of 1973, and informed Unit X that I was ready to come over to Warsaw.

CHAPTER III

Second Draft

The official, or to use a more accurate term, the bureaucratic life of the Conrad project dates from the moment when Unit X in Warsaw received word from me that I was ready with the first draft. Before then, everything was speculative and private, based on personal contacts and understanding between Andrzej Wajda and myself. Not a penny or rather not a zloty had changed hands, and so there was no need to involve any institutions. Our earlier discussions had taken place when I was in Poland on other business. But now the matter of my air fares from London to Warsaw and back came up, and the resources of the People's State of Poland would have to be tapped.

Bureaucratic controls over expenditure are in Poland – as, I imagine, in all the other East European communist states – pedantic and long-winded, no matter how trivial are the sums in question. When a Western interest becomes in any way involved, even on a purely individual basis, the bureaucratic tangle gets inevitably more complex. Any outlay must be in Polish currency, which is not freely convertible. A chronic deficiency of 'hard' Western currencies means that in principle there is none to spare, even to refund personal expenses.

Polish Air Lines fly Warsaw to London four times a week. It is, to coin a phrase, a soft currency route. But apparently Unit X had to apply for permission to pay a foreign national's fares in zlotys from the Polish end. All such cases have to be referred to a special committee, which has powers to refuse any application. On top of that it was the tail-end of the financial year, and Unit X was running short on credit. As I was given to understand later, they had thought it tactically advisable to delay my arrival till they could open accounts for 1974. They might have thought it was a hopeless task to try and explain the system to a naïve, London-based writer, or simply they had learned from experience that in doubtful cases the safest course was not to answer queries. At any rate, my eager request to come with *Second Wind* to Warsaw was greeted with prolonged silence. It took several messages, phone calls, a fairly angry personal letter to Wajda and two months of waiting for an air ticket in my name to arrive finally at the London office of Polish Air Lines.

I arrived in Warsaw at the beginning of February 1974. I pocketed my seven days' allowance and a modest sum in zlotys for 'consultations.' Apparently, with the Conrad project already registered under Mr Braun's name, I could not be, for the moment, officially employed as a scriptwriter. I stayed two months. I found Andrzej Wajda eager to get to grips with the project, but refusing to test his English reading ability on my script. In the end we spent the better part of one night at his home, going through the script scene by scene and page by page. I remember it as pretty hard going. Talking through the scenes, and occasionally translating directly, I was becoming sharply aware of the seeming incompatability of the two languages, and of the cultural and –

indeed – political barriers that would have to be scaled before the project could be brought to fruition.

Trouble started with the opening scenes. Wajda rejected them with good humour but left no room for argument. The main point in favour of the Conrad film – he explained – was that it seemed a thoroughly 'safe' subject, and with the thirtieth anniversary celebrations of People's Poland drawing close political controversy was out. And here I was with Conrad's Russian exile and the menacing Cossack figures in the very first image of the film. Such untimely reminders of Big Brother's wilful ways in an earlier incarnation are in very bad taste indeed. Thus, right at the start of our discussions, I was deprived not only of some of my pet scenes, but of an important structural principle: flashing forward from Conrad's troubled childhood to his final adventure in old age. Once the opening sequence had gone I had to admit that the early part of the film seemed limp and unclear, the action too slow in getting under way.

On the other hand there were scenes and themes, especially later in the script, that Wajda approved of. He liked the way in which Conrad's relationship with the boy Heather had been stated and developed, he liked the absurdly nonchalant formality of the officers under the great pressure of the elements, he liked the intrusion of the plane and the young pilot's haphazard death, he liked the ending in the Bridlington police station, and, most importantly, he accepted the theme of xenophobia – the crew's growing antipathy to Conrad and their readiness to blame him for the expedition's failure. In fact, Wajda thought that the first draft held sufficient promise for my approach – and my personal involvement – to be continued.

That night session with Wajda was followed a few days later by a lengthy three-cornered discussion, involving Wajda, Boleslaw Michalek – the Unit X literary director – and myself. We talked, among other things, about the form and dramatic function of the flashbacks. None of us felt that we could dispense with them. But Wajda was not keen on the idea of pure image flashbacks, no matter how strong and evocative. He suggested that we replace the images with a more theatrical device of figures from Conrad's Polish childhood and youth – his parents, or uncle Borowski – materialising on board *HMS Ready* to challenge the old writer in direct exchanges. Wajda had recently used a similar device most successfully, both on the stage in Dostoievsky's *The Possessed* and on the screen in *The Wedding*. But although not inhibited about putting forward his personal preferences, he was still not emotionally committed to the Conrad project, not certain that he would want to direct it himself. It wasn't so much that he had doubts about the subject, or the story line. He seemed to be searching impatiently for a single image, an idea, an interpretation, perhaps even a catch-phrase that could suddenly fire him and release his energies. I was trying hard to provide it. It briefly appeared that I succeeded by saying that it takes a genius to become English when one is not; and even then it is impossible. That's what the story was also about. Wajda liked it. He picked it up at once and became live to the project for the rest of the evening.

It was finally decided that before I left Poland I should produce a revised outline in Polish and then a full second draft in English, cutting the opening, tightening up the middle and the end, and replacing flash-

backs with realistic 'ghosts'. Meanwhile, Michalek would hopefully succeed in unravelling the bureaucratic tangle, so that I could sign an 'official', retrospective contract (I was running out of the 'soft' zlotys), and the Conrad script could be re-submitted to the Ministry under my name.

It was still a white and frosty winter when I got back to work, a muddy Polish spring of sun and showers when I felt ready to face Wajda and Michalek again. I threw out the opening six scenes, including the flight. I now proposed to open the film with a camera tour of Capel House, Conrad's rented residence in Kent – a matter-of-fact, almost documentary look at a very English place. 'Capel House, Kent, England. His home and his castle. The crust on the acquired way of life . . . ' ran the Narrator's opening lines, as we moved from a distant view of a red brick, chimneyed farm house with squarely cut edges surrounded by a moat filled with water, to the front garden with 'roses in late autumn bloom', the drive with a spotless convertible motor-car of the period, the orchard at the back, to cut finally to inside the living room where Jessie, Conrad's invalid wife, was seen embroidering a rug, a pair of crutches within easy reach of her. We also meet John, Conrad's younger son, before going up with Hadji, the family's mongrel dog, to peer at the writer in his upstairs study. I wanted Conrad to appear a strangely exotic figure, out of place in this setting, excited in a thoroughly un-English way, waving his arms about and murmuring to himself in an incomprehensible language. He carries an aura of madness as he applies himself fiercely to clearing up his desk – a Don Quixote in a conventional English suit, all set to start a new incongruous quest. As he takes a batch of papers to an open fire-place and strikes fire, the strange figure of a youth appears in the background: he is the boy-Conrad, aged about seventeen (the age when he was leaving Poland for good), dressed in old-fashioned travelling clothes. The old writer acknowledges the boy's presence with a slight nod, and carries on.

In the next scene, outside the house, Conrad says good-bye to Jessie and John in the best conventional English manner, and drives off. Then it is straight to the brigantine *HMS Ready*, setting sail, with Conrad on board a sailing ship for the first time in twenty-five years, sharing in the cheerful bustle of the departure. At dusk, essential information is given out in a short conversation between Sutherland and Conrad, as they train their binoculars first on the blacked-out, receding line of the Scottish coast ('Just like a savage coast. Not a single light anywhere', says Conrad, the old, warm sea memories swelling up), and then scan the grey waves, already checking for any sign of the enemy. The writer chooses the silly sounding name of Mr Jones for himself – following the enigmatic aristocrat in *Victory*, his recent novel – and they walk down to the 'war conference' in the cuddy.

I tried to preserve and develop what I judged to be the stronger elements of the first draft, looking within them for possible new narrative connections that could make the whole structure tighter, more organic. Having lost Conrad's flight I introduced just a glimpse of a plane early on: a small British single seater bi-plane, circling high over the ship in heavy weather. Conrad allows Heather, the little servant, a peep at the plane through the binoculars, and the boy repays this by showing the old writer the treasure trove inside the deck house.

. . . The door is being pushed open from the outside by HEATHER. A stream of light, constantly shifted by the violent motion of the ship, dances on heaps of soiled rags and rope. HEATHER is leading the way, with CONRAD right behind him. The boy gets busy on a pile of rags, shoving it away, until a round, metallic object comes into view.

HEATHER: Look, sir. There it is!

CONRAD kneels down, removes another rag or two, touches the thing with his fingers, and then starts searching impatiently for something in his pockets. He finds and takes out a monocle, inserts it into his eye and crouches low to examine what is now clearly revealed as the thick barrel of a machine gun. He glances up and smiles happily at HEATHER, crouched on the opposite side.

CONRAD: A quick-firing Gardner gun, I think.
Well done. . . .

This is the beginning of their intimacy. Heather proved to be a most serviceable character. His presence on board in a sense compensated for the lack of a woman. It was an informal relationship, making possible a range of insights into the private person of Conrad. But as a servant as well as a child, Heather also helped to put across, in a simple and – I thought – effective way, the social pyramid on board *HMS Ready*. Heather's lowly social status on board is shown in scene 20. A dinner is served in the cuddy during a furious gale. Things are going badly, with one false alarm and no other U-boat sightings, and now the wrong kind of weather developing:

. . . SUTHERLAND, OSBORNE, MOODIE and CONRAD are seated around the table, which, like the rest of the cabin, is in constant, violent motion. HEATHER, dishevelled, looking rather the worse for wear, is positioned behind the Captain's chair. A lot of water is rushing, swirling and splashing all over the floor. A constant, thin spray seems to be overhanging the dining table. All the officers are wearing long rubber sea boots and thick woollen 'mufti', damp, crumpled and dirty-looking. . . . The rolling and pitching of the ship is so violent that the 'fiddles' – crossed sticks of wood – do little to prevent potatoes, vegetables and whole plates from falling off the table. It is HEATHER's task to retrieve them, and he has to dive in time and again, not always successfully, keeping his feet with difficulty and coming up looking every time more frightened and miserable. He keeps throwing quick glances at CONRAD, trying to meet his eyes, to enlist his sympathy. But for all the impossible circumstances, the poverty of the menu and their shoddy appearance, the officers insist on keeping up certain rigid formalities, grotesquely determined that their breeding should win through against the fury of the elements. Nevertheless the mood is naturally a bit strained, and Sutherland tries to ease it with a yarn from his own past:

SUTHERLAND: . . . And if one sail blew away into shreds
he bent another immediately. . . . Get a move
on, boy! Don't wait for it to bounce into
your lap!

The last two sentences are directed, scoldingly, at HEATHER, who has dived at the Captain's feet to retrieve a flying potato, missed it, and comes

up ruffled, expecting to be told off, the freckles on his face seemingly multiplied by specks of spraying gravy. . . .

In contrast, when Conrad and Heather are alone, as during their somewhat childish gun-cleaning sessions, they talk freely, exchanging little intimacies. Already feeling ostracised by the crew, Conrad is able to find out the reason from the boy. Heather, although embarrassed by the question, doesn't withhold the truth:

HEATHER: It's . . . nothing personal, sir.

CONRAD (*glancing up*): Nothing personal?

HEATHER: Well . . . there's some talk that the Commodore sent us out here because he was anxious for your safety.

CONRAD gets to his feet, surprised and hurt.

CONRAD: What? Say that again!

HEATHER sees the impact he has achieved, but goes on, rather miserably.

HEATHER: They say, sir, that you're too important to be exposed to risk. That you're someone big, an admiral, or something, from one of those foreign countries who are in with us. So we are made to sail the safe seas, while all the German subs are down south. . . . They don't like it, sir, but it's not a personal thing.

On another, later occasion, again crouched by their Gardner machine gun, they chat about the old writer's background.

Working in perfect accord, like two experienced gunsmiths, they are assembling the lock together, having apparently taken it apart to wipe the sea water away, remove any rust and cover all the vulnerable parts with grease.

HEATHER: What is your country like? Is it far?

CONRAD: Do I seem foreign to you? You don't accept me as English?

HEATHER: Well, you're not, are you, sir? You seem all right, but you're not English.

CONRAD shows no bitterness at this. He replies kindly, with a smile.

CONRAD: Where do you think I come from?

HEATHER: Some say you're an Eastern gentleman. Is Jones your real name, sir? It doesn't really suit you. They keep making fun of it.

The smile fades from CONRAD's face.

CONRAD: What's in a name ?

HEATHER (*in a childishly enquiring mood*): Is it very far, your country?

CONRAD: It's not all that far. It's where the war is.

Poland was never identified by name in these exchanges. It seemed to me that one could lose rather than gain by being too explicit. I have always believed that cinema can communicate tensions set up on a very private level. A popular audience can receive and respond to tensions without understanding their hidden motives. On the other hand if you explain too much, you shift the drama onto a level of awareness where the majority of your viewers are simply not prepared to follow. I therefore felt free to hint at and refer to things in Conrad's make-up which were deeply meaningful to me, without much hope of making them clear to the wider audience; to show the symptoms, and not the cause. The guilt feelings in Conrad, awakened by his cultural isolation on board the Q-ship, refer back to his apparent 'betrayal' of Poland. The root cause is lodged in his childhood and adolescent memories, and therefore the intimate contact with Heather makes the old writer still more vulnerable. I was trying to set up a fairly intricate underground network of references to Conrad's guilt complex which at one point surfaces in an apparently incongruous passage of cinematic action – the sudden intrusion of a plane and the death of the adolescent pilot. Heather helps, again, to set up this sequence. It follows immediately after their conversation about the writer's country of origin.

HEATHER grasps the handle of the gun, swings the muzzle away from CONRAD, aims it at the horizon and lowers his head to look through the sights. . . . Picking a spot somewhere in the west, low over the horizon among the flocculent clouds, he rasps a passable imitation of machine gun fire.

HEATHER: Ta-ta-ta-ta-ta-ta-ta-ta-ta. . .

And suddenly, from the direction where the gun is pointed, a dark speck really does appear out of a cloud, and growing quickly becomes a low flying bi-plane.

The plane comes in low over the masts. They can see the lone pilot looking down and the British colours on the wings. It turns sharply and comes back, swooping down. 'This time it dives so low that it seems to touch the top of the main mast. Then it gains some height again, but suddenly it appears almost to stop and hang suspended in the air for a split second, before gliding down faster and faster, sideways into the sea. Its double wing snaps and breaks on touching the surface, as if water was solid. . .' Conrad, visibly shocked by the accident, forces his way into the rescue party. On reaching the wrecked plane they find the corpse of the adolescent pilot '. . . partly submerged, washed over by successive waves, his face down and arms outstretched, one foot caught up in the rigging of the broken wing.' I wanted Conrad to feel at that moment, quite irrationally, that the dead face he was going to see in a second could be the face of Borys, his son; or a familiar face from his youth, perhaps his own. And I wanted him to feel responsible for this death, as if he himself had caused it. But any attempt to put it literally on the screen, even through the narration, would surely have destroyed the reality of the situation.

The only real chance to articulate those strange guilt feelings in Conrad was provided by the appearances of the 'Polish ghosts'. They

invade the ship for the first time during the heavy weather, with the old writer laid low by extreme weariness. In scene 16, at night, water is splashing in the officers' cabin, with Sutherland fast asleep and snoring, and Osborne, on a lower bunk, muttering obscenities every time a headlong pitch of the ship causes him to be sprayed with a dense shower.

CONRAD raises himself wearily on his elbow and tries to blow out the flame of the little paraffin lamp. But he is woefully short of breath and after two panting attempts the flame only flickers. Glancing up in some embarrassment CONRAD sees seated at the foot of his bed BOY-CONRAD, dressed (as in the opening scene) in old-fashioned travelling clothes. But this time his face is sad. He is gazing at the old man with rueful sympathy. With a grimace of annoyance, as if he felt caught out and discredited, CONRAD inhales noisily and blowing with all the force he can muster extinguishes the flame.

Next morning Conrad oversleeps and wakes up alone, feeling drained of all energy.

The gale has subsided somewhat, but inside the cabin the wash is several inches deep, and still rushing in all directions. CONRAD's long rubber boots are floating in it, well out of his reach. He raises his head and looks at the boots with a despairing expression in his eyes. . . . The strange figure of a big, middle-aged man appears at the door. He is TADEUSZ BOROWSKI, CONRAD's uncle and guardian after the early loss of his parents, round faced and bushy whiskered, dressed in a short overcoat of mid-nineteenth century cut and long, black, leather boots. . . . Splashing through the water energetically he approaches CONRAD and stops at the side of his bunk.

BOROWSKI: There's war in Poland again.

CONRAD: Yes I know, uncle. I know.

BOROWSKI (*irritably*): No, you don't know! Only settled people know about war, people who belong to a place.

CONRAD: Can't one belong to more than one?

Uncle Borowski goes on berating his old nephew for his lack of practical sense, with Conrad just watching miserably, his sea-boots floating away.

He points a finger at them, saying softly:

CONRAD: Uncle . . .

BOROWSKI's expression is now much more amiable. He reaches out as the boots move past him, lifts them out and hands them over to CONRAD who at last sits up. He turns them upside down, first one, then the other, watching the water spurt out of them. When he raises his eyes again, BOROWSKI is no longer there.

I was never entirely happy with that scene. Cinematically, I think, it could have been made to work quite effectively, but the content of the dialogue seemed too arbitrary and too direct. I was much more pleased with a later visit from the 'ghosts', in scene 25. This time it was brought on by spiritual pressures on Conrad – the growing animosity of the crew. It is Conrad's turn to take a bath in the cuddy:

A large wooden bucket full of steaming hot water is standing on the floor. CONRAD, completely naked, is seated behind the bucket on a stool, his clothes folded neatly and arranged in an even pile on his bed. The rolling motion of the ship makes the water overspill onto the floor, but CONRAD, deep in some gloomy thoughts, is in no hurry to start washing himself. Undressed, he looks like a sadly disintegrating mutation of what must have been once a pretty powerful body. The skin on his broad chest and shoulders looks parched and old, the muscles flabby, fading into loose folds further down on his belly. At last he raises his foot and tries the water, but with a painful little hiss withdraws it hastily. A weak smile passes through his lips and he whispers:

CONRAD: Nothing personal . . .

With sudden determination he thrusts both his feet deep into the bucket. The hot water makes him frown, but he sticks it out, splashing it energetically all over the rest of his body. He raises his eyes and suddenly curls up in a gesture of extreme embarrassment, knocking his knees together and covering himself with his long arms. Watching him, from the other side of the tight little cabin, is a couple dressed oddly, all in black: APOLLO KORZENIOWSKI, CONRAD's father, a thin, feverish looking man in his early forties (his irregular features resemble CONRAD's own, but he is younger, slimmer, and his jet-black beard grows longer), and EVELINA, his mother, a woman of about thirty, wasted by an illness but with traces of former beauty, her large eyes blazing with fever. CONRAD, extremely agitated, shakes his head in protest.

CONRAD: Please don't! . . . Mother . . . father . . . please don't look! It's not the way I am usually.

EVELINA smiles soothingly, and APOLLO starts speaking quickly, blurting out words as if with suppressed excitement.

APOLLO: You've grown old, son. You've lived much longer than we have, you have seen much more of the world, you're much wiser, you've achieved more. And you are free.

CONRAD shakes his head again, denying his father's assertions. APOLLO goes on, taking no notice.

APOLLO: When you look down on us from your Olympian heights, tell us, what do you see? Am I a dwarf? Our lives and what we did with them, does it matter at all? My poems, her sacrifice, my plays, her tears, Poland, plotting, revolution, exile, her death, my death. . . . All very provincial. . . . Can you see any merit in us at all?

CONRAD continues to shake his head, muttering anxiously:

CONRAD: No, no! . . . I mean yes! I have no right to pass judgement. Not I . . .

APOLLO and EVELINA raise their eyes to the ceiling, suddenly losing interest in the old man. Sounds of a commotion up on deck come through. . . .

It is, in fact, an alarm – a submarine has been sighted. Conrad springs into action and his parents are no longer in frame.

Conrad's emotional confusion in this scene seemed to me exactly right. Oblique to the uninformed audience, it had, in fact, a strong 'underground' cohesion. His guilt complex about deserting Poland could not be stated more powerfully than through a confrontation with his tragic parents. I felt confident that, properly realised, the scene could achieve a real impact, even if its content remained, to many, unclear. But such success, even while writing a script, brings its own structural problems. Any other 'visitations' after that scene could very easily turn out to be anti-climatic. In the Polish outline I did include what was really a conventional flash-back to Apollo Korzeniowski's Cracow funeral, but I dropped it from the second draft. I retained the *Almayer's Folly* flash-back, well liked by Wajda, in the final sequence of the film.

A tropical beach. A pair of bare, shapely, feminine legs walk away from the camera leaving deep footprints in the yellow sand. A slim girl (Nina) in a shimmering white wedding dress, long, pitch-black hair streaming down her back, comes into view. Suddenly, a native warrior (Dain) in a red Sarong materialises at her side. They are walking away towards the sea, their arms around each other. In the foreground an old man, ALMAYER, in tattered remnants of European clothing, crawls into frame. He is obliterating the girl's footprints, filling them in with sand, shaping little grave-like moulds over them, then crawling on his knees to the next impression. ALMAYER gets up and in the act of rising becomes old CONRAD in his formal English suit, staring impassively at the sea. The sun is beating down, sending glistening, pulsating reflections across the water. In the distance a small vessel is setting yellow sails.

I hoped we could accommodate this single quote from Conrad's own imaginative work – a reference to the end of *Almayer's Folly*, his first English novel. It contained the right ingredients of a rich exoticism and a desperate nostalgia for some lost values.

It is all right to confuse the audience with foreign apparitions and oblique references providing realistic action, when it comes, is clear, direct and sufficiently dynamic. I needed a tighter plot, an interconnecting pattern of accidents that would make of the North Sea expedition a coherent story in its own right – and the scope for it, in the available material, was rather limited. I decided to diversify, as far as possible, the three U-boat incidents, and then make them fit into a pre-arranged scheme, which would be revealed only at the conclusion.

The first U-boat causes a full scale alarm, with hasty battle preparations almost completed, when the tension is suddenly deflated: the sub is British. A hangover-feeling after that disappointment is strong, but a rising gale keeps the crew busy. I added a brief incident there, with Conrad, already unpopular with the crew, saving little Heather from being swept overboard. Then the wind drops and the brigantine becomes practically becalmed:

A fairly dense mist is hanging over the water, with the pale November sun apparently unable to chase it away. The brigantine is under full sail, but making very little progress. In contrast to the fury of the recent gales she seems like a ghost ship, white and silent. . . . On the deck some movement starts, with a few men coming out with replacement props for the damaged disguises. The storm has played havoc with them, breaking and blowing away some of these rather fragile structures. CONRAD appears, too, carrying a hammer, ready to join a working party, but he runs into MUSGRAVE and RAMPLING dragging the heavy wireless set out of the wireless room. MUSGRAVE smiles ruefully at the old man.

MUSGRAVE: A piece of scrap. It's been soaking up sea water like a sponge. Gallons of it.

CONRAD: What are you going to do? Drop it into the sea?

MUSGRAVE: Not just yet . . .

RAMPLING (*grimly*): We might hit a submarine.

Rampling, the ship's mechanic, doesn't hide his mistrust of Conrad. On a sudden urge the writer decides to have it out with him.

CONRAD: Have you lost all hope of an engagement, Mr Rampling? You sound so despondent. You consider her an unlucky ship?

RAMPLING: Not the ship, necessarily. She's quite a good old hulk. There are bad ships, of course, but much more usually it's people. Just one person among the crew can turn the ship's luck against her.

CONRAD: And who gets your vote in our case?

RAMPLING drops his eyes to avoid CONRAD's determined gaze, and answers evasively:

RAMPLING: It's not for me to say, sir.

The urge to confront the crew and their veiled insinuations leaves CONRAD as suddenly as it has seized him. He laughs hoarsely and wheels round, turning his back on the two men and facing the sea. But the laughter cuts short before he can take a step. He raises his arm to point out something at sea in a loud whisper:

CONRAD: There . . .

(Scene 34) *The mist is lifting slightly and visibility around is improving. A point appears on the calm surface of the water not further than two hundred yards from the ship. The thing grows quickly into a perpendicular tube carved at the top. Next, some superstructure appears, a gun washed over by the sea, and, with great swishing of displaced water, the long, cigar shaped hulk of a submarine. On the deck of the* Freya *no one moves. Everybody has by now seen the submarine and all the eyes are fixed on the emerging hulk. Its appearance is too sudden, too close, too late to do anything about. The deck, the steel of the guns gleaming through the broken disguises, is suddenly exposed to prying eyes. No orders are given. After a couple of seconds only RAMPLING comes to life and scampers down the hatch to his engines. The submarine continues rising, until her colours come to*

the surface: she is British. On board of the brigantine the spell breaks at once and the crew starts moving about.

MUSGRAVE: I thought we'd had it.

CONRAD doesn't answer, continuing to watch the submarine. A hatch opens, and a man's head and shoulders appear in it. He raises sea glasses to his eyes, pointing them at the deck of the brigantine. The sub's engine splutters and she starts moving away, but the man's glasses remain fixed on the Freya.

The third and final appearance of a sub was, in contrast, a fairly elaborate affair. It came after the incident with the plane that had flopped into the sea, with the expedition on its way back, not far from the English shore. A sub alert has been called, but the procedures lack urgency – till the sub is identified as German. The U-boat comes close and stops, its deck gun apparently trained on the brigantine. 'On the sailing ship a hush has fallen, everybody seemingly holding his breath. Suddenly, water around the submarine starts whirling and boiling: the vessel is submerging.'

In the background four British trawlers are steaming towards them in a straight line. The Germans are, in fact, running away from them, and the Q-boat, waiting for a challenge, is not ready to give battle immediately. But there is still the danger of the Germans firing a parting torpedo, and so Sutherland orders a sharp tack. Meanwhile, 'the four trawlers are seen breaking up their straight line formation. Two of them veer in opposite directions and make as if to outflank the brigantine; the two others draw level and move apart, continuing on a straight course. Suddenly there is a flash on the deck of one of them, followed by a sound of an explosion. A shell whines over the masts of the *Freya*, splashing into the sea a few hundred yards away.'

That warning shot is meant for the *Freya*. Soon, after an exchange of signals, the brigantine is boarded by a hostile, tense party of armed sailors, led by a nervous young lieutenant. They see the armaments, disguised only from the sea:

. . . the twelve pounder guns and the spare shells left over from the sub alert a moment ago. A fluttering British ensign, run up a minute earlier, only increases their suspicion. The LIEUTENANT looks sharply at the officers facing him, all dressed in dirty and crumpled 'mufti', and picks out CONRAD, the oldest, and at first glance appearing to carry the greatest authority. He speaks to him sharply, ignoring the others.

LIEUTENANT: Are you in command of this ship?

CONRAD: No, I'm not. Captain Sutherland is in command here.

His foreign accent; as he says it, is clearly perceptible. SUTHERLAND steps forward, but the young officer raises his pistol threateningly. He speaks quickly and nervously, for some unexplained reason still addressing himself mainly to CONRAD.

LIEUTENANT: I'm warning you! All our guns are trained on your ship! A single shot and you'll be blasted from all sides! Don't imagine we don't know about you!

At last SUTHERLAND gets a word in, speaking in a tone of injured dignity.

SUTHERLAND: Since you know everything, Lieutenant, you must know that you're on board *HMS Ready*, a brigantine sent out on a special assignment, acting under the direct orders of the Admiralty. The Norwegian ensign and the name are a disguise, to fool the enemy.

This confuses the young LIEUTENANT considerably, but doesn't quite dispel his suspicion. Incongruously, he points his pistol at CONRAD.

LIEUTENANT: Who is this person, then?

SUTHERLAND hesitates, perhaps considering this might be an opportune moment to reveal the writer's identity, but CONRAD comes in himself to allay the danger.

CONRAD: The name is Jones.

MUSGROVE, standing very tense behind the officers with his flags still in his hands, gets an attack of nervous giggles. MOODIE joins him, unable to restrain himself in spite of a withering glare from OSBORNE. Smiles and giggles spread among the crew and suddenly CONRAD, seemingly the most unlikely person to be prone to giggling, bursts into nervous laughter. The LIEUTENANT, now hopelessly bewildered, lowers his gun. But the laughter dies out quickly, and the young officer speaks in a positively miserable tone of voice.

LIEUTENANT: You have been reported as a suspicious ship, carrying guns and an excessive crew.

SUTHERLAND: Reported by whom?

LIEUTENANT: One of our subs. A navy airplane, sent out to check on you, has not returned. We have orders to intercept you.

Thus the tension between Conrad and the crew is temporarily resolved in this explosion of giggling, and another burst of laughter, more derisive, soon ends the film. Sutherland insists that the writer, suffering with gout, is put ashore by the trawlers in the nearby Yorkshire port of Bridlington and after some opposition Conrad gives in. On shore he is immediately reported as a suspicious character and picked up by a bored police constable who takes him to the local police station, where

a long-haired, middle-aged SERGEANT is dozing, his feet up on the counter. The door opens and the CONSTABLE enters, letting CONRAD through in front of him. The writer is obviously highly annoyed. The SERGEANT opens his eyes and looks, but is in no hurry to assume a more alert posture.

CONSTABLE: Here, sergeant, I've got a real weirdie for you. He was put ashore from a foreign sailing ship. Just listen to the way he talks.

During this introduction CONRAD stands, unavoidably, in a posture of wounded dignity. The SERGEANT's eyes light up and he gets to his feet. His voice is heavy with a veiled threat.

SERGEANT: Can I see your papers? Can you identify yourself . . . sir?

CONRAD is making a visible effort to remain composed. His lips are trembling a little. As always when he is under stress, his foreign accent becomes most pronounced.

CONRAD: I'm afraid I've left my passport at home, or rather in a safe. It's all a misunderstanding. Let me explain . . .

SERGEANT (*harshly*): No papers? Your nationality, your name and business? What have you been doing on board this ship?

CONRAD replies in an injured tone.

CONRAD: I am British. My name is Joseph Conrad. I am an English writer!

The SERGEANT's face suddenly dissolves into a grimace of merriment. The CONSTABLE, anticipating this reaction from his superior, roars with wild laughter.

It was the only time Conrad's name was ever mentioned in the script – in its last line. Well, that was it. I came to the end of the second draft without losing any of my enthusiasm for the project – an achievement in itself. I felt it was a real improvement on the first: tighter – forty-six scenes in all – and richer, setting off high spots retained from the first draft to better effect. Unfortunately, Wajda was not in Warsaw. Boleslaw Michalek, who can read English, thought the new version was all right. He commissioned a quick translation so that the Polish text could be submitted to the Ministry, while in London I searched for a willing co-producer.

CHAPTER IV

Across The Shadow Line

Temperamentally I am not particularly well suited to the business of setting up a film. There is a basic flaw in my organism: talking about money doesn't excite me, doesn't make the adrenalin flow. But I clearly had to accept the responsibility for arranging the British end of the Conrad co-production. In Poland, all co-production agreements have to be negotiated and signed by Film Polski, the distributing and selling arm of the State Film Industry. But as a rule, the officials responsible for the negotiations are not too keen to conclude them successfully. Their practical wisdom tells them that they personally gain nothing from those international adventures, while they risk being held responsible for any unforeseen disasters. So they have to be, almost literally, outmanoeuvred and pushed into it. In the case of the Conrad project we hoped that the indispensable political will to go into a co-production would exist at the ministerial level, but no one in Unit X had the necessary contacts and familiarity with the British film-making scene to gain the initial foothold here and commit the Film Polski people to talks.

In Britain it seemed a bad time for any film projects. The film industry had disintegrated after the withdrawal of American finance. Wajda had agreed that television interests were by no means to be excluded, but spiralling British costs and the general economic gloom had spread to the television companies as well. Yet there was a chance that the crisis would actually help us. After all, the Poles were offering what on the surface seemed a very good deal. *Second Wind* would be shot in Poland and with Polish resources. The Baltic would stand in for the North Sea, and Unit X would find a suitable sailing ship. The British hard currency investment would only have to pay for the English actors and a couple of days' shooting on the two English locations, the exteriors of Capel House (Conrad's Kent home) and on the Yorkshire coast. With the growing dearth of new English-dialogue films, an opportunity of obtaining an expensive-looking production for a relatively small outlay sounded attractive.

I had two early bites, almost as soon as I started hawking my script around. One was a film company, a newly formed partnership of two minor producers. I do not intend to identify them here, since in the end nothing came of this approach. They read the script and said they liked it. There was some glib talk about investing in the project up to four hundred thousand pounds and getting Trevor Howard to play old Conrad, but first – they suggested – Andrzej Wajda should clear up some mess he had left behind: his *Gates of Paradise*, shot ten years earlier, was never released. He could shoot some additional material in Poland with the resources of his own production unit, and release the re-edited feature in the West under the banner of his new British partners. My impression was that the new company was – like a number of others in the feature field – a purely speculative venture, feverishly searching for some real assets, and an involvement with a state-owned,

communist film industry, with what they saw as an unlimited supply of soft currency, seemed worth a try.

The other approach involved television. It started with a personal friend, David Naden, destined to play an important part in this project. David, a film editor of consummate skill, runs, with a group of free-lancing friends, a film-making co-operative with cutting rooms in Wardour Street. In 1973 David Naden Associates supported David's and my joint project to make a fifty-minute television documentary, *Home and Away*, about second generation Polish immigrants in this country. The film was shot in Poland and in Britain, in partnership with a local, Silesian television station in Southern Poland. Naturally I now asked David to read the Conrad script, hoping for some encouragement and advice. Not in vain. David thought there was a film in it, and offered to pass *Second Wind* on to Jolyon Wimhurst, the new Executive Producer of Documentaries at Thames Television. David Naden had worked with Jolyon, and knew that he was interested in an occasional big and ambitious drama documentary.

It took a couple of weeks for Jolyon Wimhurst's response to reach me, via David. The message was: 'Let's meet for a drink and a chat.' I went with David to see him in his office late one afternoon.

Thames Television is in Euston Road, in the windiest spot in London. As one crosses over from Warren Street underground station, powerful air currents almost beat one back. Once on the other side you turn left at Capital Radio, under a towering office block, and the wind turns too, blowing dust into your face. Having made it to the door, you smile cheerfully at the beefy security guards, making them think you work there, and walk purposefully past them to the lift. Thames current affairs and documentaries take up the entire third floor, but to get to Jolyon Wimhurst's office you have to walk the whole length of a dispiritingly anonymous corridor, taking in the clutter of typewriters on either side from rows of seemingly identical offices. However, right at the end of the corridor, there is a quite unexpected slight bend – an accidental dent in a rigidly symmetrical structure. You negotiate that and walk through the swinging door to the *Report* office – a fairly hopeful place, with piles of newspapers on desks and an air of chaotic activity. The Executive Producer's little private office is at the far end.

Jolyon Wimhurst turned out to be an amazingly accurate English copy of the late Zbigniew Cybulski, Wajda's great star of *Ashes and Diamonds*, with the same face of a disgruntled human bear, the same slack movements and slovenly manner, a touch of impatience with the routine and the conventional constantly showing through. Cybulski had something else – a romantic urge to communicate, to be at one with the people, the overflowing generosity of feeling on constant offer. Jolyon Wimhurst – well, making adjustments for several worlds of difference between an eccentric Polish actor and a Cambridge-educated, youngish and ambitious television executive in London, perhaps the spark that burns in him is also romantic in origin.

It was opening time in the little club bar on the fifth floor, so we moved there. Jolyon was interested in the project on Conrad and the prospect of Wajda's personal involvement in it. He accepted the script in general and thought it was too early to get involved in detailed discussion. I asked him, over the first double whisky, how much money he was prepared to put into the project. Around ten thousand pounds,

was the answer. It seemed disappointingly little, so I repeated the question over the third whisky. Up to fifteen thousand, said Jolyon Wimhurst, but he also made it clear that the offer was conditional on Wajda's personal involvement in the direction. The offer was confirmed on another, wholly sober occasion a couple of weeks later in Jolyon's

Jolyon Wimhurst (left) and Boleslaw Sulik

office. He suggested that Wajda come over as Thames' guest to discuss the project.

It was a cautious start, and the sums mentioned were of course modest in feature film terms, but at least the proposition was genuine. Thames Television, responsible for weekday programming in London and the South East of England, is reputed to have a very solid financial basis. The giant EMI holds a major interest in it, with BET as another major shareholder. The Board of Directors is openly business-oriented, not seeking prestige, not personally involved in film-making. It makes for an unadventurous general strategy, and a certain lack of commitment to the company's more ambitious projects, but, on the credit side, there is little editorial interference from the Board. In 1974, just as I was making my first approach to Jolyon Wimhurst, a wind of change seemed to be sweeping down those long Thames corridors. The giant *World at War* series of twenty-six hour-long programmes brought commercial and critical success to the third floor. It was a personal triumph for Jeremy Isaacs, the Controller of Features, Current Affairs and Documentaries and the sovereign master of that floor. He was promptly elevated to the top position of Director of Programmes

with a seat on the Board. Thus there was now a voice there of a man who wanted to make not only money but good films, and was not averse to seeking prestige for the company with an occasional ambitious 'art project'.

John Edwards, at one time a *This Week* reporter, took over as the Controller of Current Affairs. But just before going up, Jeremy Isaacs appointed Jolyon Wimhurst, one of his documentary directors, to the position of an Executive Producer. Jolyon got an annual budget of some £220,000 (for 1974) to play with, and the initial offer of £10,000-£15,000 towards the Conrad project was meant to come out of that allotment.

It may seem odd that the documentary department of a television company should want to be involved in what was essentially, from the outset, a feature film project. It was not an accident. With the feature film industry chronically sick and fighting for survival, television drama increasingly studio bound and artificial, pressurised into a fairly strict formula by economic considerations, the documentary people inside the television companies feel that it is left to them to make real films. In fact the role of television documentaries, and, more specifically, of documentary drama (where within the necessary budgetary limitations a considerable personal freedom to experiment still exists) in keeping British film-making alive, has not been sufficiently recognised. Many documentary film-makers feel understandably frustrated at this lack of critical appreciation. Perhaps Jolyon Wimhurst hoped that getting involved in the Polish extravaganza would help to illuminate this very important and very deserving area of film-making. After all, the treatment of *Second Wind* I first asked him to read was a documentary drama of sorts.

Another factor working for us was a very laudable kind of cultural snobbery inside television. To feature producers brought up in the old cinema industry, the name of Andrzej Wajda smacks of minority tastes, of obscure, foreign, subtitled art-films. Commercially, such a reputation is still more of a drawback than a recommendation. But many of the current television film-makers and executives, now in their late thirties or early forties, have had their visual tastes defined and refined by minority film-going in university film societies and continental cinemas. Others probably aspire to a similar refinement. Wajda is a great name for them. To work with him, to have Wajda under contract, must mean a lot.

I put all that to Andrzej Wajda on my next visit to Warsaw, in June 1974. I relayed the other offer as well. He had no hesitation in preferring the television one, in spite of the meagre amount of money available. In the office of Unit X I found thick piles of duplicated scripts, still for some tactical as well as linguistic reason titled *The Last Berth; Second Wind* doesn't really translate into Polish. Much more worrying was the sloppy character of the Polish translation. Stretched out, inflated lines of dialogue had lost all rhythm and much of their edge. Even the stage directions seemed messy and imprecise. It explained at least partly, I thought, a certain coolness towards the project I detected in Wajda.

Progress had been made on the bureaucratic front. The new script was submitted to the Ministry and approved in principle. The only point of official criticism was that the Pole in Conrad had not been

sufficiently brought out, and Michalek asked me to devise an additional scene that would remedy the alleged weakness. I felt no enthusiasm for this assignment. I still believed that it would have been a mistake to make Conrad's attitude to Poland over-explicit. In the end I decided to write an ironic prologue in a tone which seemed foreign to the rest of the script. To my amazement, everybody liked it, including Wajda at one extreme, and the patriotic bureaucrats on the other. In time the scene grew on me too.

The scene is the Commodore's office in Granton, a small port near Edinburgh. The Commodore, Admiral Sir James Starvin, a gaunt old man with a bald, bullet-shaped head, is talking to Sutherland about Conrad, although at this stage the writer is not identified by name. The Commodore is hoping that Conrad is going to become 'a chronographer' of the Navy's heroic deeds in this war. This is why he is prepared to yield to the writer's fancies and put him on board a Q-ship. Taken into his superior's confidence Sutherland dares to voice a reservation.

SUTHERLAND: Sir . . . an anxious thought . . . I understand he came ashore more than twenty years ago. He must have aged, got used to his home comforts. Can he bear the hardships of a Q-boat expedition?

Suddenly, STARVIN's lean face goes red with anger. He rasps out, caustically:

STARVIN: In your opinion old sailors are useless? Do you know how old I am?

Confused, SUTHERLAND reverts mechanically to his dutifully formal manner.

SUTHERLAND: I don't know, sir.

STARVIN: You don't have to know! But you ought to know that if it wasn't for my duties here I would lead that pirate expedition myself! Do you think I'm less competent than you to take charge of it? An old sailor, on an old sailing ship, with a few old guns and an old-fashioned crew is worth five of your submarines and ten steam-boat captains. Please get it through your head that the whole point of the exercise is to use good old British Navy cunning against these crude new inventions!

SUTHERLAND nods assentingly. An awkward pause. The COMMODORE, calm again, seems ready to dismiss the Captain, who manages to get in with another timid question.

SUTHERLAND: Sir, his accent . . . Which of the Allied countries does he come from?

Consternation. STARVIN stares blankly at the Captain, who responds with a sheepish smile. The question of CONRAD's origins has so far escaped the COMMODORE's attention, and now suddenly seems highly disquieting. (What if he comes from one of the enemy countries?) Finally STARVIN shouts towards the door at the top of his voice.

STARVIN: Duty officer!

No answer. STARVIN, an angry frown on his face, gazes mistrustfully at the tall, old-fashioned telephone on his desk. Reluctantly he reaches out for it and speaks into the receiver.

STARVIN: Get me Underwood!

A RECORDS ROOM somewhere in the same building. Shelves on all sides reaching up to the ceiling, filled with heavy volumes and files. At a small desk in the middle, UNDERWOOD, a young man with a look of religiously intense, priest-like devotion on his face, is listening to the phone.

UNDERWOOD: Yes sir, one moment.

He gets up, leaving the receiver on his desk.

BACK in the COMMODORE's office. STARVIN, holding the receiver to his ear, nods his head briefly.

STARVIN: Thank you.

He replaces the receiver and turns to SUTHERLAND.

STARVIN: He is Polish.

SUTHERLAND nods, but continues to stare at the old man, expecting more.

STARVIN

(*impatiently*): Polish . . . He comes from Poland.

Another awkward game. The two officers look at each other sheepishly. Exasperated, STARVIN grasps the phone and yells into it furiously.

STARVIN: Underwood!

A LONG CORRIDOR. UNDERWOOD is walking quickly, carrying an armful of books and documents.

IN THE COMMODORE's OFFICE STARVIN and SUTHERLAND are still facing each other across the desk. A knock on the door. UNDERWOOD enters and stands to attention.

STARVIN: At ease. Please begin.

SUTHERLAND turns his chair around and sits down again. UNDERWOOD takes a few steps forward and places his papers at the side of the desk, holding on only to a large map. A mint new copy of The Shadow Line *lies on top of the pile. With an extravagant, sweeping gesture, UNDERWOOD unfurls a map of Europe, holding it, vertically, in front of himself. He glances down and with his index finger describes a wide circle around the uneven, red-pencil line of the Eastern front and the pre-war frontiers of the three continental powers, not one of which is Poland.*

UNDERWOOD: Until the late eighteenth century the Kingdom of Poland had been among the largest sovereign states of Europe . . .

STARVIN

(*impatiently*): Yes, yes. We know that . . .

UNDERWOOD continues unruffled.

UNDERWOOD: Then it was partitioned among the Crowns of Prussia, Austro-Hungary and the Russian empire. It no longer exists as a sovereign state.

STARVIN, anxious to get to the point, interrupts him again.

STARVIN: In this war . . . Which side are the Poles on? Ours?

UNDERWOOD: To judge by their writings, or the number of abortive uprisings, they've never accepted their loss of sovereignty. They are unlikely to show concern for the interests of the occupying powers.

STARVIN: Very briefly: what are they like?
UNDERWOOD: Chivalrous, proud, hot-headed, quarrelsome, apt to romanticise . . .
STARVIN: And our guest? What can you tell us?

UNDERWOOD folds up the map. SUTHERLAND picks up the slim volume of The Shadow Line *and opens the front page.*

UNDERWOOD: His most recent . . . An advance copy.

UNDERWOOD puts the map aside and picks up from a pile of documents a large, blown-up photograph of CONRAD. He clears his throat, holding the photograph in front of him.

UNDERWOOD: Jozef Konrad Korzeniowski, more commonly known as Joseph Conrad. Born of an impoverished, land-owning family, the only son of Apollo, a Polish revolutionary sentenced to exile for . . .

STARVIN grimaces with distaste at this last bit of information and interrupts again.

STARVIN: A revolutionary? . . . Not a sailor?
UNDERWOOD: Sir, they are not a sea-faring nation. They have no navy.

STARVIN and SUTHERLAND are astounded.

STARVIN: No navy? How the hell . . . How did he become a sailor?

UNDERWOOD raises his eyebrows.

UNDERWOOD: A gentleman's whim.

STARVIN nods consentingly. SUTHERLAND takes the photograph from UNDERWOOD and looks at it with a sudden interest.

STARVIN: Loyal? No reservations?
UNDERWOOD: None . . . Except that he is of course foreign . . . and a genius. Not wholly predictable.

STARVIN raises his hand and with a finger draws a small circle over his head, indicating madness.

UNDERWOOD: Precisely.

The remaining Ministry reservations were withdrawn after reading that scene, and a few additional lines of narration contributed by Michalek. The official seal of approval was given. It did not mean, at least in Wajda's personal case, that every line of the script would have to be slavishly adhered to. But it was still a necessary procedure, an exercise to be performed in all apparent earnestness.

But the day when the cameras would turn was still as remote as ever. Wajda was now thinking about another director, with himself in the producer's chair, perhaps with an 'artistic supervision' credit. Krzysztof Zanussi – a younger director building up an international reputation – read the outline and declined politely, saying that a period piece about England was not his cup of tea. I applied myself to correcting the Polish translation of *Second Wind* – a job considerably more strenuous than making an original, proper translation. At last, with nothing happening and Wajda busy in the theatre, I went back to London.

The fiftieth anniversary of Conrad's death came and went. The momentum seemed to have been irretrievably lost. In September rumour reached me that another Polish director, Zebrowski, wanted to

make a film of my script for Unit X. Zebrowski is an interesting character, intelligent and introspective, but – to be brutal – his name means nothing outside Poland, and I doubted whether the project could be resurrected under his direction. Anyway, I heard nothing about it directly. Not a word reached me from Warsaw for another couple of months. Suddenly, one evening late in November, Michalek phoned me. Are Thames still interested in the Conrad project, he wanted to know. And could he and Wajda come over for talks before Christmas?

Jolyon Wimhurst was still interested. If anything, the situation was more favourable now. Thames had decided to do an occasional prestige 'art' programme, and Jolyon hoped that Wajda's *Second Wind* could be set up on that basis. That would mean more money. Up to thirty thousand in cash could be available, plus 'under the line' contributions from Thames, with a top budgetary limit of fifty thousand. And it would come from outside Jolyon Wimhurst's annual documentary budget.

Wajda and Michalek flew in two days before Christmas 1974. I collected them at the airport. On the way to Euston Road I learned that it was Zebrowski they had in mind as the director, possibly with an English co-director. Answering my warning that it might not be possible to set up a co-production of this kind, Wajda said that he was willing to work out any compromise formula, short of his full directorial involvement. He could, for instance, personally direct the 'ghost' sequences. But he felt emotionally unable to commit himself wholly to this project.

The first meeting in Jolyon Wimhurst's office was courteous and non-committal. There were just four of us. We skirted around what had become the main issue – Wajda's reluctance to direct – exchanging observations about trivial matters like money, locations, ships, British advisers and collaborators. Wajda withdrew into his reserved and uncommunicative posture, preferring to be interpreted, making little effort to speak in English. In the evening Jolyon was throwing a party in the Hammersmith Terrace house of Penelope Horner, the actress. Wajda modestly accepted the role of a great foreign celebrity, standing in a corner, a glass in his hand, exchanging a few civil words with people who approached him. It fell to me to introduce him to Jeremy Isaacs. Jeremy declared, rather assertively, that it would be a great honour to be associated with Wajda in a film project, and called over his adolescent son to meet 'the great man'.

I went off early with Boleslaw Michalek, leaving the party still in full swing. It gave me the chance to explain to him again the situation as I saw it, what were the attractions of this co-production to Thames TV, and why they depended on Wajda's personal commitment to the project. I felt that somehow the party made this easier for Michalek to grasp. Next morning I was going to meet them at breakfast at their hotel, before meeting Jeremy Isaacs in his office and having further talks with Jolyon Wimhurst. I got there early, and found a marvellous change of mood. Andrzej was all smiles and warmth. 'Sit down', he said, 'drink your coffee and listen'. Apparently Boleslaw Michalek had come up with a great idea – or at least one that Wajda immediately took to. He simply suggested that we incorporate in the script a complete sea story by Conrad. Not as a flash-back or a series of flash-backs, not artificially

woven into the North Sea escapade, but a completely autonomous narrative stream, running parallel to *Second Wind*. Wajda liked it so much that he decided, there and then, to make the film.

There was hardly even time to regret the passing of *Second Wind* in its original form. I mentioned a couple of likely titles: *The Shadow Line*, *Youth* and *Secret Sharer*. *The Shadow Line* was the obvious favourite, if only because Conrad finished it just before his Q-boat expedition.

We told Jolyon briefly about the new brainwave on the way to Jeremy Isaacs. Jeremy made a short, very warm speech, promising Wajda all support and full artistic freedom. No pressures of any sort, except the budgetary ones. Curiously, Wajda made almost no response. He seemed totally absent again. But in Jolyon's office he became live and practical. He wanted me to come to Warsaw as soon as possible after Christmas to start work on the new version of the script. He suggested that Jolyon come in January, to be shown off as a real, live English producer and to start discussing the agreement in detail. Jolyon Wimhurst agreed. To him, the script clearly came second. If Wajda insisted on introducing a new element into it as a precondition for his personal involvement in the direction, there was nothing to do but to accept it.

It was 24th December 1974, Christmas Eve, the most important and best-liked day of the year in the Polish Calendar. Wajda and Michalek were rushing off to do some last minute Christmas shopping, for London purchases to shove under their Warsaw Christmas trees. It's an old Polish custom.

CHAPTER V

The Soft and Hard Currency Sell

Of course I felt greatly relieved that the project was going on, at least to the next stage. And that my duties as an honorary go-between had been honourably discharged. I succeeded in bringing the two parties together on the original terms, the same that I had flaunted to awaken an interest at the British end. The only cost was a rather crucial change in the script, but that, for the moment, appeared to worry only me, personally. To be sure I quite liked Michalek's idea. I was even looking forward to adapting a genuine Conrad story for the screen. Wajda felt that in spite of all my efforts *Second Wind* remained weak on the crucial issue of Conrad's literary genius. It was failing to communicate the exact quality of the writer's imagination, or the dense texture of his prose. And one has to assume that what the director doesn't see in the script isn't there. Michalek's idea appeared to solve this problem at one sweep – or at least transferred the responsibility from the screen-writer to the director. At the same time I realised that in the juxtaposition of the two stories the original concept and the autonomous structure of *Second Wind* could not possibly be saved. For instance, the Polish 'apparitions', structurally so important, became superfluous at one stroke. In the inevitable cutting and pruning to make room for the other element, the dramatic highlights would have to be retained at the cost of measured pace and introspective moods. There was also a psychological threat, easy to anticipate but almost impossible to protect against: in any conflicting claims that the two stories would make on us, the Conrad one would of course be treated with much greater respect, its integrity ensured and protected at the cost of *Second Wind*.

I was thus being asked not only to collaborate but to take the lead in destroying the structure I had so painstakingly built. But then, I had had sufficient, if not very varied, screen-writing experience to realise that this comes in the nature of the job. Having a strong, long-standing commitment to the cinema helps me to accept the unavoidable frustrations insufferable to writers of a purely literary background.

I flew to Warsaw again in the first week of January 1975, with Jolyon Wimhurst following a week later. In the initial talk with Michalek and Wajda *The Shadow Line* was confirmed as the story to be adapted. *Youth*, the other one still in the running, with a similar theme of a first adventure and the loss of innocence it brings, and with several brilliantly visual elements like the smouldering fire on board, the explosion and the total destruction of the ship and the young hero's first encounter with the East as the life-boat under his command reaches land, was rejected as too expensive and difficult to produce. Polish studios are not really equipped for extravagant action special effects, especially at sea. *The Shadow Line*, although the more difficult of the two to transfer to the screen, seemed less demanding on resources, and it fitted in better with *Second Wind*, providing a number of emotional and intellectual points of reference. It was also decided that this time I should write the screen-play in Polish, to make it fully accessible to

Wajda and – I now felt strongly about it – not to let the translators loose on it.

Jolyon came. For a while the Poles found it hard to accept that a true-life English producer could have the face and manner of a hung-over Zbigniew Cybulski – the most eccentrically Polish of Polish actors. His first encounter with the Unit X people came in somewhat unusual circumstances. The première of *The Land of Promise*, Wajda's most recent film, was being held in the large industrial city of Lodz, eighty miles south west of Warsaw, on the day Jolyon Wimhurst arrived. It had been agreed that I would collect Jolyon at the airport and accompany him to Lodz in a hired Fiat car.

Lodz is the most dispiriting place in Poland. It is big, sprawling, and quite colourless. A grey nausea hangs in the air. It was one of two Polish cities to escape destruction in the last war (the other one being Cracow) and it has since paid for that piece of luck. Investment had been so scarce that when Wajda was making *The Land of Promise* on location there – the film deals with the beginning of the Lodz textile industry at the turn of the century – he was able to shoot inside factories which in appearance and technology have hardly changed in the last seventy years.

Cameraman Witold Sobocinski

We had rooms reserved in a small utility hotel away from the centre – the Lodz 'Grand' was full. We got there – Jolyon with Penny Horner and I with a Polish lady friend – hungry and late, with barely time for a

beer and a sandwich before changing and rushing off to the cinema. It was filled with textile workers and local dignitaries, plus a group of Russian visitors in the front row led by a squat Soviet general, his chest too short for all the medals dangling there. Andrzej Wajda came on stage to say a few apposite words. A special Master of Ceremonies welcomed the important guests, including the Societ general and the workers, with Wajda clapping them in turn. Then the entire cast and the huge technical crew trotted out, pressing together across the full width of the stage. It was one of those curious Communist occasions when the mighty and the snobs pay their ritual dues to egalitarianism.

The film on offer was a many-stranded epic told with all the production values and all the panache of the old Hollywood at its most confident. Not a bad dish to set in front of an English producer from a tight-fisted capitalist television company. A reception was held afterwards in the local film artists' club, with all the invited guests asked to contribute 250 zlotys per head. Some of the people who would work with Wajda on the Conrad project were there: Barbara Pec-Slesicka, the production manager for Unit X, Witold Sobocinski, the cameraman, Daniel Olbrychski, the actor, envisaged by Wajda for the part of young Conrad in *The Shadow Line*. Jolyon Wimhurst was much impressed with his screen presence in *The Land of Promise*. But the reception was not helpful to cross-cultural intimacies. We were sat around a long, L-shaped table with our backs to the wall, with little to do but to stuff ourselves with food and to fight for our just share of vodka – which in the end turned out to be plentiful. Only Andrzej Wajda was moving around the table, spending a couple of minutes with every member of his old crew. He finally reached us, at the very moment when a party in the next room, much further gone than ours, spilled over. A very jolly gentleman with a large soda siphon staggered in, aiming a foamy jet at our table – an incongruous, grotesque echo of the famous scene in Wajda's *Ashes and Diamonds*. Andrzej gave him a blank look, as if confused about the reality of this happening, then suddenly leapt at the man, turned him around and threw him physically back through the door. I had not seen Wajda before display such physical agility, or such vehemence of feeling.

Next day, back in Warsaw, the talks started, in the cramped two rooms of Unit X and in the somewhat grander setting of Wajda's home. The idea was to get a measure of agreement about the project, before involving Film Polski in the formal negotiations. Present, apart from Wajda, Jolyon Wimhurst and myself, were Boleslaw Michalek and Barbara Pec-Slesicka, the production manager, while for one evening session at Wajda's place Sobocinski, the cameraman, turned up as well. The discussions were practical and wide-ranging, taking in locations (favourite for *The Shadow Line* part of the film seemed to be the Adriatic coast of Yugoslavia, with the Polish Baltic coast the obvious choice for *Second Wind*); availability of sailing ships; casting (the possibility of signing a 'name' British actor to play old Conrad was considered); the need for British expert advice for the sailing and storm sequences; and other forms of assistance, like the provision of small, portable lights and gyroscopic tripod heads for shooting at sea. Andrzej was never still, pouring drinks, running to the phone, disappearing out of one door to appear, two seconds later, through another, yet always involving him-

self in every subject discussed. With him, such restlessness is always a sign of keen form.

Barbara Pec-Slesicka, producer for Film Polski

The mood was, on the whole, optimistic. It was, after all, a meeting of practical film people and the positive specific nature of the problems discussed meant there was little room for mistrust. One obvious point of conflict between the British and the Polish interests concerned the running time and the screen ratio of the proposed film. The Poles were planning a big, spectacular production for wide screen theatrical release, while Jolyon Wimhurst wanted out of it a ninety minute English television film. In Poland, almost like in the Hollywood of old, the current economics of film-making tend to inflate feature projects often beyond the dictates of the subject. Cinema seats are extremely cheap, but now there is a chain of theatres in the major cities with wide screen 70mm projection facilities, allowed to charge much higher prices. With luck, an expensive production – like *The Land of Promise* – can recoup its costs from this initial big screen release. On top of that, any production planned to run for two and a half hours or more counts as two films for the purpose of remuneration.

It seemed inevitable that the two different language versions would also have to differ in length and screen ratio, in spite of all the difficulties that would cause on the set, in editing and in cutting the negative. This rather tortuous method made the choice of Wajda's English collaborators all the more important. Even if he was to stand by his original intention to throw off his inhibitions and communicate with the English cast directly, with the subject in some of its aspects so intrinsically English he obviously needed a film maker with genuine English

Andrzej Wajda and Michael Darlow (right)

sensibilities constantly at his shoulder. Jolyon Wimhurst's candidate for this position was Michael Darlow, a free-lance television director who had worked a lot abroad and who had a Slav connection at home in London in the shape of a Yugoslav wife. David Naden would be offered the job of editorial supervision in the Warsaw cutting room. Wajda had already met them both at that pre-Christmas party in Hammersmith Terrace.

It was time to involve the Film Polski people in drafting a preliminary agreement. It led to a sharp change in the procedure, mood and level of the talks. In Unit X discussions we could afford to be free-wheeling and chaotic, speaking in both Polish and English at the same time, because of everyone's easy familiarity with the subject. Now we were suddenly being forced into stiff formality, with broken English the official language, with tight-lipped smiles across the table and stares of desperate incomprehension. The general manager of Film Polski is Mme Alicja Ciezkowska, a thin woman around forty, whose somewhat forced feminine charm seemed to be doled out in strictly regulated quantities. She had only recently been appointed to this position after apparently distinguished diplomatic service as a cultural attaché in Paris. Naturally, she had no idea how a film comes to be made, still less a complex co-production, and this created a range of new problems. But it was inconceivable for her to admit her ignorance. So she was mistrustful and wearily defensive, suspecting a catch in almost everything, fearful of making a false step. Mr. Wladyslaw Braun, Mme Ciezkowska's deputy, who normally takes charge of such negotiations, was away, and the genial and decent Mr. Wrobel – in Polish his name means 'a sparrow' – who seemed to be doing all the actual work, was too lowly in the Film Polski hierarchy to speak with an independent voice. Unit X was represented by Wajda, Michalek and Pec-Slesicka, but Andrzej, having opened the proceedings with the rather sweeping statement that everything had been resolved and there were no basic disagreements between the parties, left on some urgent business. Barbara, the production manager, who could not speak English, soon followed him and it was left to the patient, civilised and intelligent Michalek to pilot the talks through. I could almost feel Jolyon Wimhurst sweating. He insisted, I thought rightly, on taking back to London some preliminary, signed agreement, so as not to let the project slide back to zero point, but for the first time in Warsaw he was losing contact with what was going on. It wasn't enough to have had experience of the bureaucratic mind. Capitalist bureaucrats operate on a different principle. They accept money and profit as the objective and the measure of success. Here the subject of money was actually shirked, while some hazy concept of prestige seemed to remain as the only motive.

An official lunch provided an interlude in the two days of talks with Film Polski. It was held in the 'Bristol' – one of Warsaw's tributes to the bourgeois past; tall rooms with painted stucco ceilings, ornamental palms and paper garlands left over from the New Year's Eve Party. Two small flags, the Polish and the British, marked the table. Andrzej Wajda returned to us briefly and Daniel Olbrychski, the actor, joined us to demonstrate his broad American accent. A toast to the project was drunk in very small glasses of vodka; and now Jolyon Wimhurst betrayed his weak qualification for diplomacy in Eastern Europe. Vodka he could

accommodate with little trouble, but he turned out to be allergic to fish. No salted herrings in sour cream, no caviar, not even smoked salmon.

Then it was back to the polite hostility of the negotiating table. In the end, on Jolyon's last day in Warsaw, a preliminary agreement was drafted. In it, most major, practical issues were deferred till the later binding co-production agreement. The principle of two different versions – the 90 minute television version and the two hours or more cinema version – was accepted, but Film Polski preferred the cinema film to be shot in English as well as in Polish, hoping thus to increase its export potential. This was one of the deferred decisions. Thames TV was to receive the rights to the 90 minute TV version in Great Britain, and Film Polski all the rights to the Polish cinema version. Thames TV offered to act as distributor of the television version throughout the world – excluding Poland and the 'socialist camp' countries. Distribution problems were to be the subject of a separate agreement. No sums of money were mentioned, but the responsibilities of Thames TV covered the following areas:–

1 Securing the rights on Conrad's *The Shadow Line* (there was some doubt about the copyright situation).
2 Research and location work for the shooting in Great Britain.
3 A leading English actor to perform the role of old Conrad, and other English actors – maximum seven in all.
4 English crew and facilities for shooting in Great Britain.
5 Assistant director and supervising film editor.
6 English post-synching.
7 Specialist advice on shooting, and possibly the supply of light-weight equipment for storm scenes.
8 Obtaining necessary Union agreement.

The Polish producers accepted responsibility for all other aspects of production, and the British partner ceded all effective artistic control to them. Jolyon Wimhurst pressed very hard for some kind of a time-table to be written into this document. The final scenario, to be written by me, was to be completed by 15 February 1975 and both parties agreed to aim at signing 'the agreement as soon as possible – not later than in April 1975'. It was the 'intention of both parties that shooting will take place in 1975'.

We finished drafting the document around 3 pm. Jolyon was leaving by the early morning plane the next day, hoping to take the signed document with him. It proved impossible. Office hours in Poland start early and finish normally at half-past three, or at four. Apparently there was no time for the Film Polski secretaries to type the preliminary agreement. 'Overtime' was out of the question. Jolyon's desperate pleas went unheeded and Michalek's offer to type the thing himself was rejected. Jolyon Wimhurst flew to London on schedule, but without the preliminary agreement. It took a couple of weeks and several urgent calls from London for the document to be sent over.

I stayed behind to re-write the script once again. First, I had to get a Polish copy of *The Shadow Line*. This wasn't easy – incredible as it may seem. Books are cheap in Poland, and Poles read them avidly – or at least buy and collect them in great numbers. But – allegedly because of the paper shortage – there is a limited number of copies per edition, no matter what the demand. It is a sellers' market. *The Shadow Line* had

been translated from English three times, but I found it was unobtainable from either new or second-hand Warsaw bookshops. A collected edition of Joseph Conrad's works had been published to commemorate the 50th anniversary of his death, but it was available by subscription only, and anyway, I would have to buy all 26 volumes just to get my hands on *The Shadow Line*, the thinnest of them all. Wajda and Michalek shared a copy taken out of a public lending library: it was an old and very mediocre translation, and it had a rather crucial section, which included the climactic storm sequence, torn out of it. Wajda was glad to hear from me that in its entirety the story reads even better. Finally, armed with a begging letter from Wajda, I managed to get a copy of my very own from the publishers, thus saving myself the necessity to produce yet another Polish translation. Meanwhile, several English copies arrived for me from London.

Wajda was busy with theatre work and left me to get on with the writing. He wanted a straight and as far as possible faithful adaptation of *The Shadow Line* to be interwoven with *Second Wind*. In a sense, our adaptation was going to be truer to Conrad than his own story, because we were taking his claim that *The Shadow Line* had been autobiographical quite literally. The narrator and the protagonist of the story was going to be identified as Conrad, and Daniel Olbrychski would play him – in the English version – with a pronounced Slav accent. That would not necessitate any plot changes. *Second Wind* was there to elucidate and interpret.

That was the comforting assumption, but it did not make the practical structural problems any easier. The original suggestion had been that the two integral, independent stories should run on a parallel course. That made for a misleading image. The only way to preserve the true integrity of both these elements would be to keep them seperate and show them successively. (But my exploratory, tentative observation to this effect was immediately stamped upon). Once you start intersecting the stories, you set up a close by-play between them and you are forced to treat them as a single structure.

The trouble with *The Shadow Line* was that its dramatic convention changes abruptly midway through its course. It opens with the protagonist – Conrad to us – walking off the ship in Singapore, where he has held position of first officer, for reasons he cannot quite perceive himself: an impulsive dissatisfaction with life in general, 'the green sickness of late youth'. He claims to be going 'home to England' but spends several idle days on shore in the Officers' Home, impatiently refusing to take any interest in the affairs of the place, while a genial old sea-dog, Captain Giles, manoeuvres him into a position to claim the command of a sailing ship. Looking at it in dramatic terms, this section is really a comedy of manners, with a subtle 'detective' sub-plot. When Conrad assumes the command, the tensions become much stronger and nature intrudes as a powerful, decisive presence. The story of the ship's ill-fated journey from Bangkok back to Singapore has an epic quality, with a strong psychological undercurrent.

The first problem in combining the two stories was to avoid a double exposition. To set up the action twice, first in Britain in 1916, then in Singapore in 1887, would have seriously unbalanced the structure and bored the audience to death. I decided to cut the entire 'comedy of manners' section of *The Shadow Line*, and put at the front a shortened

exposition from *Second Wind*. Thus the combined version of the screen-play opened with the 1916 Granton prologue: the intelligence report on Conrad's Polish background. Then on to Capel House – minus the 'ghost' of the adolescent Conrad – and to old Conrad's farewell to his family. With the convertible car roaring away, I cut straight to the Harbour Master's Office in Singapore, in 1887. 'Three lofty windows gave on to the Harbour. There was nothing in them but the dark-blue sparkling sea and the paler luminous blue of the sky'. Young Conrad is getting an appointment to his first command. A captain of a sailing ship has died at sea, and the vessel has been waiting in Bangkok for a new man to take over. I retained next Conrad's evening walk with Giles to the jetty where the Harbour Master's launch was waiting to take the young captain to a Bangkok-bound steamer. It was important to introduce the character of Giles, who was to return at the end of the film, and to get across some essential plot information. I had to invent several lines of new dialogue here, but on the whole I tried to preserve Conrad's original words and 'stage directions'. I did take a few minor liberties with the plot. Conrad's first glimpse in Bangkok of the *Otago*, his ship (at this stage we were using the actual name of the barque Conrad had commanded), and his arrival on board, remained as in the book, but I cut the revelations of Burns, the first mate, about the malicious and evil ways of the old captain and his death at sea. I believed it would be cinematically more effective to retain some of this material for the later scenes, so that the irrational threat posed by the dead captain would take shape in Burns' feverish mind only gradually. And at the end of this first confrontation with Conrad Burns keels over, felled by an attack of illness already in him. In my adaptation we never went ashore in Bangkok. The Steward dies off screen, and the young captain, impressed by Burns' malignant pleas, informs the visiting legation doctor of his decision to take the *Otago* urgently out to sea, to let the clean breezes sweep the illness off her deck.

From the *Otago's* departure in Bangkok I cut to *HMS Ready* in the North Sea. At Andrzej Wajda's suggestion I devised a short new scene: the first glimpse of the Q-boat is through a German U-boat periscope. The Germans decide to spare her; she's not worth a torpedo. Meanwhile, on board of the brigantine, Sutherland and Conrad scan the waves in vain. I retained, in a compressed form, the officers' 'war conference', the painting of the new name – though this time, at Sutherland's instigation, it was the *Otago* – the discovery of the Gardner gun and conversations with Heather. Then, as a November storm blows up in the North Sea, I cut to the *Otago* becalmed in the Gulf of Siam, 'as motionless as a model ship set on the gleams and shadows of polished marble.' The sickness on board continues and spreads among the crew, Burns in bed is raving about the dead captain lying in wait at the entrance to the Gulf, and Conrad discovers there is no more quinine – the only medicine for the fever that is plaguing the ship. The quinine jars in the medicine chest are filled with some other, useless substance.

The gale is still raging when we return to the North Sea, and Conrad, the old writer, feels ostracised by the crew. I cut the first U-boat appearance and retained the one after the storm, where a sub surfaces unexpectedly, out of the morning mist. The incident with the plane and the dead pilot ended this section. In *The Shadow Line* Conrad is speaking to the sick crew, explaining their situation. Clouds gather at

last and a break in the weather comes at night. The *Otago's* exhausted crew is striving to save the ship. Mr. Burns leaves his bed to challenge the dead captain, lying in this very spot at the bottom of the sea. A squall comes and, finally, the wind.

From the climax of *The Shadow Line* to the abortive climax of *Second Wind:* the German U-boat chased away by trawlers, the British boarding party, old Conrad's farewell to the crew. Then straight to the end of *The Shadow Line*, with Conrad and Ransome – the cook with a weak heart–the only two fit men on board, assisted by the reconvalescing Burns at the helm, casting anchors and summoning medical help. Conrad goes ashore and meets Giles. The film ends in Bridlington in 1916, with the old writer being derided by the police.

Wajda and Michalek read it and responded quite differently. Wajda praised the adaptation of *The Shadow Line* but had doubts about the North Sea part of the structure. Michalek, on the contrary, thought that the dramatic highlights of *Second Wind*, now cut to the bone, appeared much stronger cinematically than the essentially introspective conflicts of *The Shadow Line*. I could see it was not yet the end of my labours. But the script was accepted in principle, and I went back to London.

I also realised by then that my other, unpaid function of a go-between would continue. When confronting one another both parties liked having me around. With no one on the British side speaking Polish, and no Pole, apart from Michalek, really fluent in English, it was obviously useful to have an honorary interpreter on constant call. Especially one who was familiar with both systems, and could interpret one for the benefit of the other; who would even be prepared to intervene directly when a crisis threatened. Unable to remain simply an interpretator, I was secretly becoming quite possessive about the project, and anxious to pilot it through. It was an exasperating situation, and fraught with moral risk: I was on the whole a trusted confidant for both sides, and I wanted to keep that trust and remain loyal all round, while working for the good of the project.

Communications were now improving, which meant more frequent problems. The delayed preliminary agreement, dated 22 January 1975, was redrafted slightly at Thames in a couple of points, apparently for purely legal and linguistic reasons. But Film Polski believed that a different form of words changed the substance of the agreement. There was a lively but unentertaining exchange of telexes and phone calls before this clearly evasive document was finally signed in London by Jolyon Wimhurst on 18 March. There was more anxious news from Unit X. The deputy Minister of Culture and Arts still supported the project, but apparently there was no fit Polish ship to stand in for the *Otago* in *The Shadow Line*. The training schooner *Dar Pomorza* was much too big and almost certainly unavailable, and *Iskra*, which might do for off shore shooting in the Baltic for North Sea sequences, was not seaworthy for the round trip to the Mediterreanean, or the Black Sea – the new favourite location. There was apparently a possibility of building a completely new ship, an exact replica of the *Otago*, and sailing her around the European continent to the location. There were experts in Poland – all Joseph Conrad fans – keen to design her, money would be forthcoming – 20 million zlotys of it, and a Szczecin yard specialising in sea-going yachts would undertake the contract. The only remaining snag was what to do with her afterwards. Wajda hoped to persuade

Polish television to buy her off Unit X to make a string of sea-faring films.

News of this scheme brought on a minor attack of jitters on the third floor in Euston Road. It would have meant putting off the shooting of the project for at least another year. In British terms it meant striking it off the current annual budget and postponing indefinitely. Luckily, the Aldwych World Theatre Season was on, and Andrzej Wajda was coming to London at the end of March with his highly acclaimed stage production of Dostoievsky's *The Possessed*. At a meeting in Euston Road soon after his arrival Jolyon Wimhurst put it to him that a postponement of that length spelled the end of the co-production.

the Regina Maris

Wajda was himself having doubts about the rationality of building a new *Otago*. He suspected that the sailing fanatics he had contacted in Poland had been leading him on, sensing a splendid adventure for themselves at Unit X's expense. But finding a suitable ship, especially one that could be paid for in soft currency, was obviously becoming a

crucial problem. There were Soviet and Rumanian training ships in the Black Sea, but apparently it was next to impossible to do a deal with those two 'friendly' navies.

A Thames colleague of Jolyon Wimhurst knew of an old sailing ship laid up in Southampton. It would certainly not be available for a soft currency charter, but as neither Wajda nor Jolyon knew much about sailing ships and had little idea of what to look for, we though that a trip to Southampton could do no harm.

We set off on a gloriously sunny Easter Monday, five of us in Jolyon Wimhurst's little Renault 5: Wajda, his wife Krystyna Zachwatowicz (the costume designer), Penny Horner and myself, with Jolyon driving. Michael Willoughby, the captain and part owner of the ship *Regina Maris*, met us at the entrance to the dock. We walked through and – there she was. Wajda's eyes lit up and he ran up the jetty with those short and somewhat jerky steps of his that mean he is suddenly alert, and working. It wasn't, I think, that she looked so beautiful. Without rigging, unscrubbed and grubby, she was showing her age. But she was so aggressively real! The thickness of her wooden masts, the copper pinnacles at the helm, the wooden gunwales – after months and months of hazy, inconclusive speculations, here at last was a *thing*, a lovely super-prop one could actually touch and put one's feet on. And in the shallow, oily waters of the port, framed by ugly, low industrial sheds and with steely modern vessels in the background, she looked romantic.

I had not seen Wajda look so happy before on this project. We circled the deck a couple of times and then stepped down into a red and plushy saloon. Patch, Michael Willoughby's young wife, appeared with a bottle of whisky. Jolyon Wimhurst and the Captain had found their way there even earlier and were talking quietly in the corner. The ship needed to be fitted out for any journey, but could be made available in reasonable time. And the price was lower than expected. A 15 weeks charter, providing for a month each way and 5-6 weeks shooting in the Black Sea, could work out below £30,000. Jolyon was adamant that the total Thames financial commitment could not exceed £50,000, but he thought that with careful budgeting, and with the Poles providing everything that soft currency could buy, half of the charter money could be squeezed out at the British end. Providing the Poles could find the other half – about £15,000 in hard currency – *Regina Maris* could be ours.

There were, it is true, some discrepancies between *Regina Maris* and Conrad's *Otago*. *Regina Maris* is a wooden barquentine, with fore-and-aft-rigged main mast and mizzen mast, and a square-rigged fore-mast. The *Otago* was a brig built on a steel frame, wholly square-rigged. We all thought that wood was actually nicer than steel – and, anyway, the difference wouldn't show on celluloid. But Michael Willoughby's drawings showed us that square sails on all the masts looked even more spectacular. He had no objections to making *Regina Maris* all square-rigged, and thus faster, providing money could be found for the operation, whether in hard or soft currency ports.

It was a crucial point in the story of this project. It did not make the rest of it any easier, but for Wajda it was the moment of final commitment. In a flash he saw the synthetic image he had been all this time vainly and impatiently groping for: the way to make the film and what it would feel like when made. Everything in it was going to be for real.

It was going to be shot really at sea, on a genuine old sailing ship, with actors housed on her, sharing all the discomforts of life on board with the British crew. No studio interiors of any sort. He was going to put Sobocinski, the cameraman, and Daniel Olbrychski, cast as Conrad, on board in Southampton for the entire outward journey. Sobocinski would take all the stock shots needed, Daniel would learn the ropes and arrive in the Black Sea behaving like a true captain, and they would both be there with a camera should anything excitingly unexpected occur.

From then on, Wajda was pressing forward. In April, soon after he left, a negociating party arrived from Warsaw. It was made up of Mr. Wieslaw Bozym – director of the Film Authors' Units Enterprise, Mr. Wladyslaw Braun – trade manager of Film Polski, and our old friend Mr. Jan Wrobel. This time they came to talk about money. The stumbling block to further progress was the problem of how to divide the commercial rights and any revenue from the film, and the additional, extremely urgent problem of a small hard currency investment from Poland to help pay for the charter of the *Regina Maris*. The parties to the distribution agreement were Film Polski and Thames Television International, the wholly owned subsidiary of Thames Television. The real decision makers were supposed to be Mr. Braun and Muir Sutherland, the head of Thames International. Mr. Bozym, the top production executive in the Polish feature film industry, was keen to talk with Jolyon about practical organisational problems. He became a 'goodie' in our books. Slow-spoken, with a confiding, open manner, but clear-headed and practical, he was obviously interested in making things happen, and believing Andrzej Wajda to be his top international asset he was keen to pave the way for the co-production. But for the time being he had to take a back seat to Mr. Braun, who had no such interests at heart.

'All communists are frustrated capitalists at heart' I had been told once, by way of flattery, by a high-ranking Polish television executive, certain that any film-maker from the West would appreciate it. There is a breed of managers in the Communist state industries of Eastern Europe who behave as if trying to prove the truth of this appalling maxim. I could, of course, be wrong about Mr. Braun's deeper motivations, but in all outward appearances he seemed a pretty characteristic specimen of that breed. These people are bureaucrats on a flat salary with foreign business trips as additional perks of the job, to whom the success or failure of a deal make personally little or no difference. But faced with 'real' capitalist businessmen they can indulge their taste for play-acting. And because they lack total conviction in what they do, they turn out a rather hammy piece of acting. Whatever the effect, they want to appear sharper than their capitalist counterparts, tougher and more predatory.

The climax to these tortuous and protracted four days of negotiations was a deliciously absurd executive lunch on the top floor of Thames. Manners inside British television companies may be democratic and matey, but dining facilities in Thames reflect a strong sense of hierarchy. Side by side on the fifth floor there is a self-service canteen for the 'workers', a licenced restaurant, and a large conference room which can be turned quickly by means of a sliding partition into two private dining suites. In one of these Muir Sutherland played host to the Polish delegation. There was an ageing 'Maitre' with a subtly patronising

attitude to us all, sniffing with aristocratic distaste at corks pulled out of wine bottles and mumbling soft apologies for the wine being slightly below the standard he would consider suitable for the occasion, and a waitress with only a few words of English, who of course turned out to be Polish. The menu was in French but the drinking went on at a somewhat vulgar pace. Muir Sutherland, a balding, very earnest Scot, and Mr. Braun were engaged in carving up the world. Countries and whole continents were being claimed, exchanged and auctioned off.

If memory serves me right, agreement was reached over coffee, in a brandy-fuelled glow of contentment and sense of power. Cinema and television distribution rights in Poland, Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, North Korea, Rumania, USSR, Vietnam, Yugoslavia and the German-speaking markets were to be ceded in perpetuity to Film Polski. The same rights in Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand, Eire, and the Socialist Republic of China to be ceded in perpetuity to Thames Television International. With the exception of those countries cinema distribution world-wide remained with Film Polski. Television distribution with the exception of countries reserved to Film Polski was to be handled by Thames Television International. The thorny question of Polish hard currency involvement was also settled: Film Polski would pay £10,000 towards the cost of the ship's charter, and provide the ship's stores for the period of the Black Sea shooting and the return journey, estimated at £2,720. But Thames Television would pay to Film Polski the first £10,000 profits arising from cinema distribution in Australia, New Zealand and Eire.

CHAPTER VI

Setting Sail

In the first week of May I was in Warsaw again, a few days ahead of Jolyon Wimhurst and Capt. Willoughby. The earlier, somewhat confused situation at the Unit X end was now clearing up in favour of the Conrad project. A television serial on the life of Chopin to be co-produced with French TV fell through, as did a love story with Piotr Wysocki, the Russian 'underground' singer, and his wife Marina Vlady, which Wajda had been supposed to direct for West German television. The Conrad project, a back marker for so long, was now becoming the top priority for Unit X, and everyone there was anxious to see it successfully through.

It was high time to decide what kind of film we were trying to make. Wajda had new doubts about the screen-play. He now thought that it was essential to preserve the organic unity of *The Shadow Line*, and that intercutting it with *Second Wind* destroyed what he called 'the crystal-like clarity' of the Conrad story. He suggested that all we wanted was to keep some elements from *Second Wind* as a frame of reference to set *The Shadow Line* in. We could open with the police background on Conrad, then show a glimpse of the old writer in the symbolically English setting, leaving it for the final sea adventure of his life, and flash back unexpectedly to tell the entire story of his first command instead. At the end we would have to bring back the old writer in 1916 leaving the Q-boat after the total failure of the expedition.

It represented, of course, the decisive death blow to *Second Wind*. But in their narrow application to the project as it was at this late stage, Wajda's arguments sounded logical. There were obvious risks in disrupting the continuity of *The Shadow Line*. And the gradual erosion of *Second Wind* had really been inevitable from the moment *The Shadow Line* intruded into the project. I had to accept that *Second Wind* had already served its purpose.

Wajda also proposed to extend *The Shadow Line* to include the entire Officers' Home section at the beginning. This worried me, and I put my doubts to him. One reason was the clash of conventions, already remarked upon, between the earlier comedy of manners and the epic sea story that followed it. The problem of pace was compounded by the prospect of moving from the expository introduction in 1916 to the generally static theatrical tensions in Singapore. But to me the crucial, most anxious point lay not only in the form but in the content of those early sequences. This ironic 'detective story' seemed a peculiarly English affair, demanding familiarity with the texture of traditional English social life and with English literary conventions. The pipe-smoking, omniscient Capt. Giles belonged, after all, to the same breed as Sherlock Holmes. Wajda, with only a superficial knowledge of English or of England, could not be expected to show sensitivity to this. And the section gave him no scope for the violent emotional contrasts and passages of visual bravura where his main strength lies.

He listened without resentment and answered, briefly, that the whole point about having British assistance was to make sure that he wouldn't fly off the rails when dealing with the British aspects of the story. But there was, I believe, a deeper motivation for his not wholly typical lack of receptivity to criticism. Having been manoeuvered, or – more accurately – having manoeuvered himself into a position where he had to go ahead and make this film, despite his instinctive reservations about the project, he persuaded himself that he wanted to make it because it was going to be unlike anything he had accomplished before. It was going to be a lucid narrative piece, with a classical clarity of structure, with everything shown and resolved on the screen. No loose ends left of any sort. And he hoped to achieve this by following Conrad as faithfully as possible.

Actually, his argument for including the 'detective story' was that it formed an essential part of the scheme devised by Conrad. The purely accidental set of circumstances put a command in Conrad's way; but once he accepted it, the circumstances fell into a significant pattern. In a different way and on a different level, the same thing happens later with the accidents of the journey. Wajda was right, of course, but a literary and intellectual coherence doesn't always make the same kind of sense on the screen.

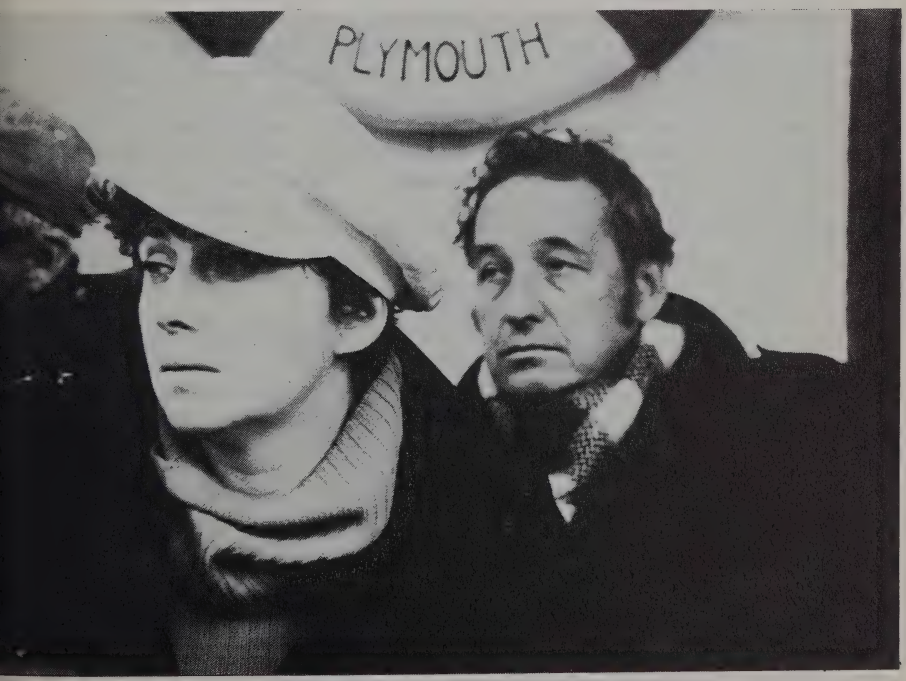
There was little to do but to agree, in principle, to those propositions. Jolyon Wimhurst flew in with Capt. Willoughby and got involved, straight away, in negotiations with Film Polski on one hand, and in our script conferences on the other. Apart from sharing some of my anxieties about the new structure, Jolyon had his own, 'political' reasons for wanting fairly strong elements of *Second Wind* retained. The unions are not naturally well disposed to run-away co-productions, and Thames needed some location shooting in Britain to keep their side of the bargain. Accepting the need for keeping the continuity of *The Shadow Line* intact, we played about with several variations of the 1916 'frame', proposing to include some library material of the German U-boat offensive and the Q-boat counter-strike, and some arrangement of the early scenes from *Second Wind*. But Andrzej Wajda was at best lukewarm to all such suggestions. He agreed that I write something into the screen-play, but was obviously reserving his options.

The expansion of *The Shadow Line* affected the production plans. There was going to be some studio shooting after all. The Black Sea shore of Bulgaria was confirmed as the main location. Willoughby verified the Polish reports, that September over there usually brings becalmed weather. The *Regina Maris* was to leave Southampton on 1st August, hopefully to arrive a few days before 1st September when the shooting was due to start. Allan Starski, a young designer whom Wajda intended to use, was to join the ship in Istanbul and start adapting the cabins on the last leg of the journey. The deck would be ready for shooting as soon as the radar was removed, while the designer could still be fiddling with the interiors. The final arrangements with the Bulgarians were still to be made, but our probable port would be Burgas, close to the Turkish border. In a wide, and reputedly 'unspoilt', river-mouth there, Wajda planned to build during August the Bangkok water-front, with a few sheds, warehouses and floating boat-houses. A tight shooting schedule was proposed: six weeks on the *Regina Maris*

and a couple of weeks on shore. Meanwhile, back in the Warsaw studios, Allan Starski would be building the Officers' Home sets, to be used for a fortnight immediately after Bulgaria. A week on Far Eastern locations – Wajda was insistent on the need for some genuine local colour – would complete *The Shadow Line* shooting.

Thus the shooting on the Baltic coast in Poland, and on British locations, could not start before late November. By that time what was now the main body of the film would take shape. Wajda felt that this schedule gave him the chance to put off the final decision on 'the frame' perhaps even until shooting had started when the film itself would take over and resolve present doubts. This is how he likes to work, refusing to commit himself for as long as possible, leaving room for last minute brain-waves and auspicious accidents. Artistically this approach can be most rewarding. In Poland his tremendous reputation allows him to get away with it, although such freedoms are denied to lesser artists. But in a co-production, where a division of responsibility is a constant issue, and planning has to be meticulous, it adds considerably to normal anxieties.

Jolyon Wimhurst, as well as worrying about the unresolved script problems, was at the same time laboriously involved in negotiating a co-production agreement with Film Polski. The growing familiarity between the interested parties did not seem to make the going any easier. One difficult area was the charter of the *Regina Maris*. Jolyon Wimhurst had not earlier envisaged finding himself responsible for the



Andrzej Wajda and his wife Krystyna Zachwatowicz

hundreds of formalities involved in chartering a sailing ship, and some practical decisions requiring expert knowledge. Capt. Michael Willoughby was present at a couple of the meetings, but at this stage his value was more ornamental than practical. With his lean face, a greying beard and a far-away look in his blue eyes, he was, to the Poles, a realisation of what a true English sailor ought to look like. It was almost as good as having the ship there. The Polish admiration for him increased when they found that he had entered the Navy in the twenties (he was now a young 62) and during the last war commanded two British submarines. Michael Willoughby agreed to throw in his services as a technical adviser under the terms of the charter, but in Warsaw he felt under-employed. The general lines of the proposed charter were confirmed: 15 weeks, or 105 days, allowing two months for travel out there. The British location shooting, undetermined in the script, was there and back, plus 45 days on the Black Sea. The legal details of the charter were to be worked out in London, between Thames and the owners of the *Regina Maris*.

Andrzej Wajda's insistence on shooting in Bangkok, or another Far Eastern location, made another subject for negotiation. Jolyon Wimhurst was very defensive about it, remembering that Bangkok lies in the hard currency area. But he agreed to make a limited contribution, enabling one British actor, playing Giles, to accompany the Polish team written into the agreement as two sequences, or four scenes, involving five days shooting at the most. Thames TV was going to be fully responsible for setting it up. It was proposed that Michael Darlow direct those sequences under Wajda's supervision.

Jolyon Wimhurst signed the co-production agreement as a separate document on 12th May. One of its clauses stipulated that early in June at the latest Wajda would come to London for the casting sessions. In separate discussions with the Unit X production team it was decided that Wajda would be accompanied by his wife Krystyna Zachwatowicz, who needed to do research for the costumes; Allan Starski, who wanted to spend as much time as possible in Southampton on board the *Regina Maris*, and Barbara Pec-Slesicka. Wajda also declared that he was going to shoot the whole film in a single English version. In fact he hoped to show it widely in Poland in the original form with sub-titles, and only dub it for the big screen, 70mm distribution.

For me it was back to the script again, with urgency, but, inevitably, with diminishing enthusiasm. For the Polish version I used, this time, scissors and tape, plundering the only available Polish copy of *The Shadow Line*. The English I re-drafted in London, waiting for Wajda's party to turn up. Meanwhile, a Thames researcher located an old film about U-boats. It was a silent feature film, made in 1927 but using a lot of actual World War One documentary material, mostly from German sources. Some images I found breathtakingly beautiful. There were shots of an English ship, with sails and funnel sticking up, hit by a German torpedo. Flames shoot up and she dies in silence, rearing up before the vortex draws her all in. There was also a skilfully re-staged battle between a U-boat and a submarine. It seemed easy and very much to the point to work such images into the opening section of the 'frame'.

A message from Unit X said that in addition to the four originally agreed, Maria Kuminek, the set dresser, would also be coming. Mean-

while in London the situation on the union front was becoming rather delicate. There was a dispute in progress in Thames' Teddington studios, affecting, among others, the prop-buying and research departments. The Poles arrived at a weekend expecting to find that all preliminary research had been done, access to museums and relevant reference material already organised, and the imposing resources of a big capitalist television company put at their disposal. Instead, very little of that had been accomplished, and the only help forthcoming was from people in Jolyon's office, willing but often unfamiliar with the task, having to learn as they went along. On top of that, a misunderstanding arose over money between Jolyon Wimhurst and Barbara Pec-Slesicka, the Polish production manager. The normal practice in Poland was for a party going abroad to apply for a hard currency allowance for their out-of-pocket expenses. Apparently this time the application could not be processed on time and the Poles arrived in London without a penny. Jolyon Wimhurst, already anxious about the continuing increase in Thames' share of responsibilities, found himself forced to fork out personal expenses on top of the costs of accommodation and research. He did so somewhat grudgingly, and for once I was unsuccessful in my self-appointed middle-man-cum-mediator role. A residue of the bad feeling sown then between Barbara and Jolyon has never quite evaporated. From then on she would often insist on the Polish rights to British assistance, rather than share in the careful husbanding of the slender hard currency resources, while Jolyon took on the part of Scrooge, holding on to every British penny for as long as possible.

Ignoring bad luck like the union disputes, the truth was that 'Jolyon's Polish extravaganza' – as the project became known inside Thames – could not count by that time on much sympathetic interest and support. In business terms it could appear a foolhardy venture, be cause it was going to be controlled from Poland, which to some members of the board must have sounded as perilously obscure as Zululand. Thus what was in reality a large-scale feature project was run at the British end like a guerilla exercise, waged from Jolyon Wimhurst's little third floor office. There were doubts even inside the department, with some film makers anxious that the project should not eat up resources intended for home documentary productions.

However, the Poles had come, and the next important junction had to be negotiated. Wajda saw the 'Q-boat' film on a Steenbeck in Euston Road. He liked the film, but was still temporising about the possible uses of some of this material in the introduction to *The Shadow Line*. He bought with him a fat shooting script in Polish, without the 1916 'frame'. I was quite disturbed to find that the script, broken down into single, numbered shots, seemed to have been prepared directly from the book, without much reference to my screen-play. It was also a depressingly shoddy piece of work. Exterior and interior scenes, in some cases part studio, part location, were listed as one continuous shot; characters who had left the set suddenly appeared still in it. Dialogue was from the old and wholly unsatisfactory Polish translation, and most of the lines added by me were missing. In the politest possible way, I refused to be bound by it. Wajda, as usual, accepted criticism gracefully. He had done the bulk of the work in a single night, he said, and had given it to the girls to type.

However, the point about all this was that Wajda was more than ever determined to follow the book very faithfully. It was a more literal and more theatrical approach than I would have wished. We agreed to share the screen-writing credit in the cinematic, 'continental' version, and Wajda asked me to come to Bulgaria. He wanted me around at least for the early part of the shooting.

We drove in two cars to Southampton: Wajda, Jolyon, myself, Allan Starski, Barbara and Michael Darlow. The *Regina Maris* looked very much as before, except that two court summonses for owing some harbour dues were hammered to the main mast. 'Take no notice of it,' said Michael Willoughby to Jolyon, and, strangely enough, the Poles never did. But now, with the project moving into a purely practical stage, the sailing ship's romantic aura seemed much less beguiling. Allan found the interior difficult to adapt. The saloon was lovely and with the right sense of period, but it did not really fit Conrad's descriptions. And the modern sailing devices kept protruding. Wajda wanted opportunities for continuous shooting below the deck, for moving the camera around, and asked that the First Mate's cabin should be in view through the opened doors of the Captain's cabin. This would necessitate taking out the bunk of Capt. Willoughby and his wife, and a part of the partition. Even then it would mean working in a very restricted space. Michael Willoughby and Patch, his wife, were not happy at the suggested changes. Barbara, on her part, was not satisfied with the standard of accommodation on board. The hold of the *Regina Maris* had been adapted to house thirty six bunks, but the cabins were tight and austere, Barbara thought, and Wajda agreed with Jolyon that it would be asking too much of actors to remain in there for weeks on end. It meant housing them in a hotel and taking them to the *Regina Maris* by boat every morning.

Michael Willoughby arranged for the Polish party to go early next morning, outside visiting hours, to the *Cutty Sark*, moored off Greenwich. It was a fruitful visit. The clipper *Cutty Sark* was of course much bigger than Conrad's *Otago*, but it came from the same time. The officers' accommodation, various sailing exhibits, badges, photographs etc. proved invaluable, not only to Allan Starski, but to Krystyna Zachwatowicz and Mrs. Kuminek. They asked Jolyon for a Thames photographer to cover all the relevant material in the *Cutty Sark* and in the Greenwich Marine Museum. But after that visit the drawbacks of shooting interiors under the deck of the *Regina Maris* became even more apparent.

In the evening Jolyon entertained the Polish party in Penny Horner's Hammersmith Terrace house. Michael and Patch Willoughby were there, as well as Michael Darlow and Sophie, his Serbian wife. But it was not a happy occasion. Andrzej Wajda asked Jolyon quietly if it would be possible to cut the *Regina Maris* charter and shoot only exteriors on her deck. Somehow the Willoughbys heard of this and became very uneasy. It was also becoming clear that the two Michaels, Darlow and Willoughby, did not get on with one another. Then Barbara decided to have it out with Jolyon, and asked me to translate, word by word. We moved to a settee, Jolyon and Barbara on either side of me, glasses of white wine in their hands. In general, she felt that Thames were being uncooperative and ungenerous, and she had a number of specific requests for assistance. Jolyon, on his part, considered that the

whole thing could be run much more efficiently and in better spirit if only she were able to take a broader, less one-sided view of the production problems. But, perhaps because they were communicating through a 'friendly' interpreter, they did not bother with any polite restraints, and finished by hurling insults at one another, only pausing to give me time to translate. I tried to filter it somewhat, anxiously searching for euphemistic synonyms, in a desperate attempt to turn their confrontation into a civilised exchange of differing views. It was one of the more hopeless and disagreeable tasks of the entire project. I envied Wajda, who in a sudden onset of sociability conversed with other people in remote corners of the house, refusing even to glance in our direction. This was, of course, in line with his permanent strategy: not getting involved in personal conflicts and specific production issues, keeping himself in reserve for major decisions.

One of those was coming up presently. On the evening before the Poles' departure from London Andrzej Wajda asked Jolyon Wimhurst, Willoughby and myself to his hotel. This time he was taking the initiative. After conferring with Allan, he said, he had concluded that shooting interiors in *Regina Maris* carried too many disadvantages and risks. He proposed therefore to transfer all the interiors to a Warsaw studio, and to cut Willoughby's charter, since he expected to finish all the exteriors in four weeks at the most. Willoughby, fore-warned about it, produced his own drawn up plans for adapting the hold of the ship. By now he was resigned to losing his own married quarters and his bunk. But Wajda was no longer interested. When Willoughby refused to re-open the terms of the charter, insisting that 15 weeks was the shortest viable period, Wajda adjourned for five minutes to confer with Barbara and returned with an instant decision. He reluctantly accepted the charter as it stood, though he expected to release the ship ahead of schedule. With only exteriors to do it shouldn't take more than two days to take off the radar and cover up all the anachronistic bits on the deck. He was going to start shooting on or about 1st September, and with all the haphazard exterior scenes of calm and storm in the can, we would move on to Warsaw, to the ship's interior sets meanwhile built there by Allan. The Officers' Home sequences would take up the final weeks of the Polish shooting.

These were evening crises. Most of the days Wajda, Michael Darlow and myself spent at casting sessions in Euston Road. Wajda was clearly enjoying that part of his London business. It was quite unlike the procedures he got used to in Poland. For Wajda casting is of crucial importance. On the set he doesn't believe in imposing a close control on his actors. He expects them to animate his films with their natural vitality and intelligence. When choosing actors he makes decisions not only about the dramatic quality, but the actual texture of a film. He can be extremely precise about the physical features he is looking for, but he is looking beyond that for an actor with the 'right feel', and one who would be whole-hearted in his response to the part. Such intuitive qualities corrupt easily, so an unknown actor, unexploited, with a 'fresh' personality, is normally preferable.

In Poland the field is much narrower than in Britain, and badly organised. Agents are unknown there, directories are not available and many actors, hidden away in small provincial theatres, are never

considered for a part in a film or a television programme. Even so Wajda in his time had made some striking discoveries, like Zbigniew Cybulski, or Daniel Olbrychski. In England the acting resources seemed unlimited, and to Wajda every actor was an unknown quality. Our restricted hard currency resources put a stop to fantasies about casting some great international stars, but we knew that in this country there was a great depth of genuine acting talent on the middle rungs of the ladder. We began by leafing through 'Spotlight', the actors' directory, studying photographs and taking note of any possibles. The two main parts to be filled – excluding Conrad, whom we presumed to have been cast already – were Burns and Ransome. Burns, the First Mate, was described by Conrad in impressionistic rather than precise terms. We only know that he was red-haired and red-whiskered. Wajda imagined him to be a grotesque, Don Quixote like figure, long, lean, with very large hands and feet, sharply pointed knees, a thin nose and big ears. Ransome, the magnificent cook, idealised by Conrad to the

John Bennett as the Chief Steward and Martin Wyldeck as Giles in the Officers' Home

point of sentimentality, was not so easily definable in physical terms. Wajda was at the time much pre-occupied with this character, seeing in him more than I was able to. In the generally pessimistic scheme of things painted by Conrad, he thought that Ransome's relationship with the young Captain was the principal life-affirming feature. On a more popular level it could be shown as a story of a difficult friendship between a Polish and an English youth. Wajda had formed a certain mental picture of Ransome, which did not seem to correspond to anything he was shown in all the fat volumes of 'Spotlight'.

Next came a long series of interviews with short-listed actors. The procedure was for Michael Darlow first to introduce himself, Wajda and me, to tell the actor briefly what the project was about and what was the part he was being considered for, and then to ask him about his recent work. Occasionally, when Michael got fed up with saying the same thing over and over again, I would take over. Wajda just sat there, smiled as he was being introduced, and kept watching the actor like a preying hawk. But as soon as the actor looked across at him, returning the stare, Wajda would turn his eyes away, only to resume his observation a moment later. When addressed directly, unless he could answer yes or no, he would answer in Polish to me, and quickly withdraw from the exchanges. Yet he could follow almost everything that was being said in English. He clearly enjoyed the process. Casting interviews, he remarked at one point, could make a good film in themselves. He was interested in how actors deal with the rather stupid pressures of this cattle-market, how they strive to assert themselves and yet win us over.

Whatever entertainment the interviews provided for us, casting the two main English parts proved difficult. A lot of good actors passed through our room in Euston Road, Richard Pascoe and John Bennett, among others, were interviewed for the part of Burns. Wajda liked them both, and in the end John Bennett was cast as the Chief Steward of the Officers' Home. But for Burns Wajda wanted a different quality. In fact, after each interview he was gazing more and more fondly at Michael Darlow, saying that only Michael had all it took to play Burns. Mike happened to be in possession of an Equity ticket, and theoretically could be cast in our film. He is tall, loose-limbed with a puckish face. He speaks volubly and acts in bursts of nervous energy. In almost everything he does his timing seems to be slightly awry; he proceeds in broken rhythm. Physically, too, he seems not wholly integrated. There is an all-over-the-place quality about Mike, which Andrzej, I think, liked a lot.

Mike Darlow started his professional life as an actor, and strove valiantly for some years to make a success of it. He found the going tough, and being a man of ambition, not prepared to settle for the second rate, he switched over to direction, in theatre and on television. But he kept his membership of Equity, the actor's union.

He loyally trotted out to Wajda all possible arguments against being cast as Burns, including doubts about his own acting talent, and still Andrzej, in a jocular yet quite earnest fashion, remained adamant. Mike, I believe, was on the point of giving up, when he brought in, for the final Burns interview, his own friend Graham Lines. Graham is huge and bony, with the sallow face of a handsome Frankenstein monster. Physically he is awkward, seemingly not in full control of his movements. There is a great weariness in him, his rich, baritone voice tailing off

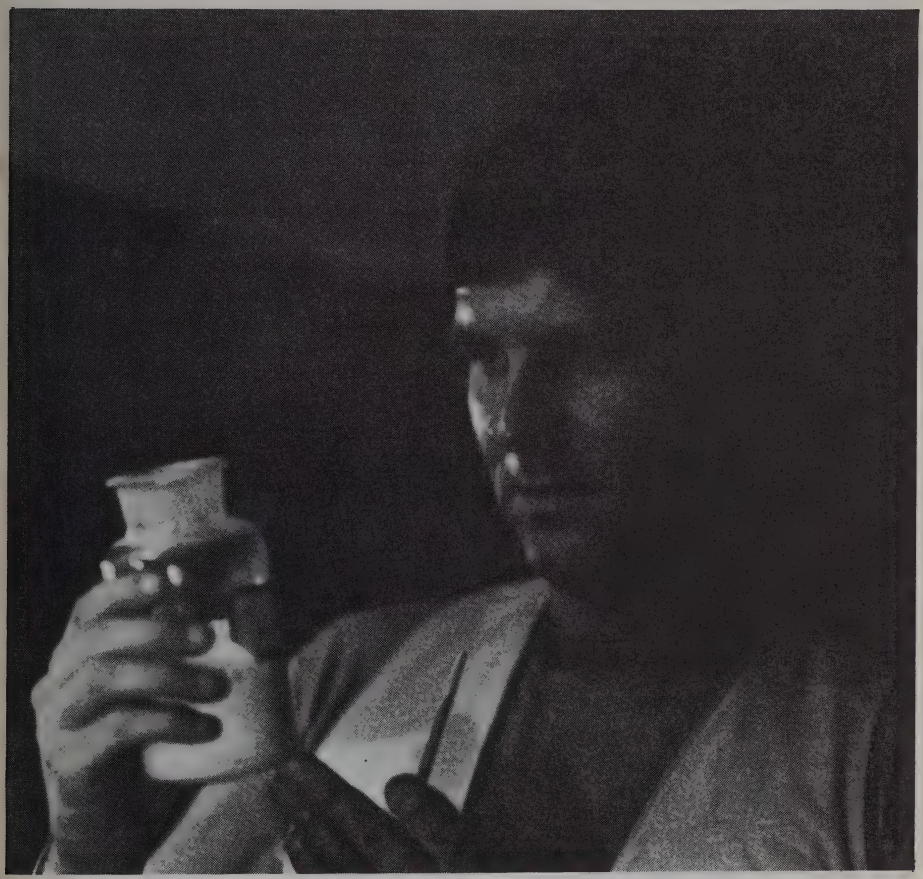
Graham Lines as Burns

tiredly. His acting skills may not be spectacular, but whatever he does, seems for real.

Wajda was clearly impressed. He asked for a screen test to be made, but he felt certain that he had found his Burns. He stopped pressing Mike, asking him to play the minor part of Hamilton instead. Mike Darlow agreed. But the problem of Ransome became ever more pressing. Wajda agreed to test a couple of actors, but they were not what he was looking for. Quite by chance he picked up a loose photograph from a desk, and pointed at a staring young face: – 'that's Ransome', he said. 'Get someone exactly like that'. The face belonged to Tom Wilkinson, a young actor from the Nottingham rep, without any experience of screen acting. His agent had sent the photograph to Thames casting, with a commending note.

The same evening Mike Darlow drove Wajda to Nottingham. I stayed behind. Tom Wilkinson was playing that night, but they arrived too late to see him on stage. Back stage they met an unassuming young

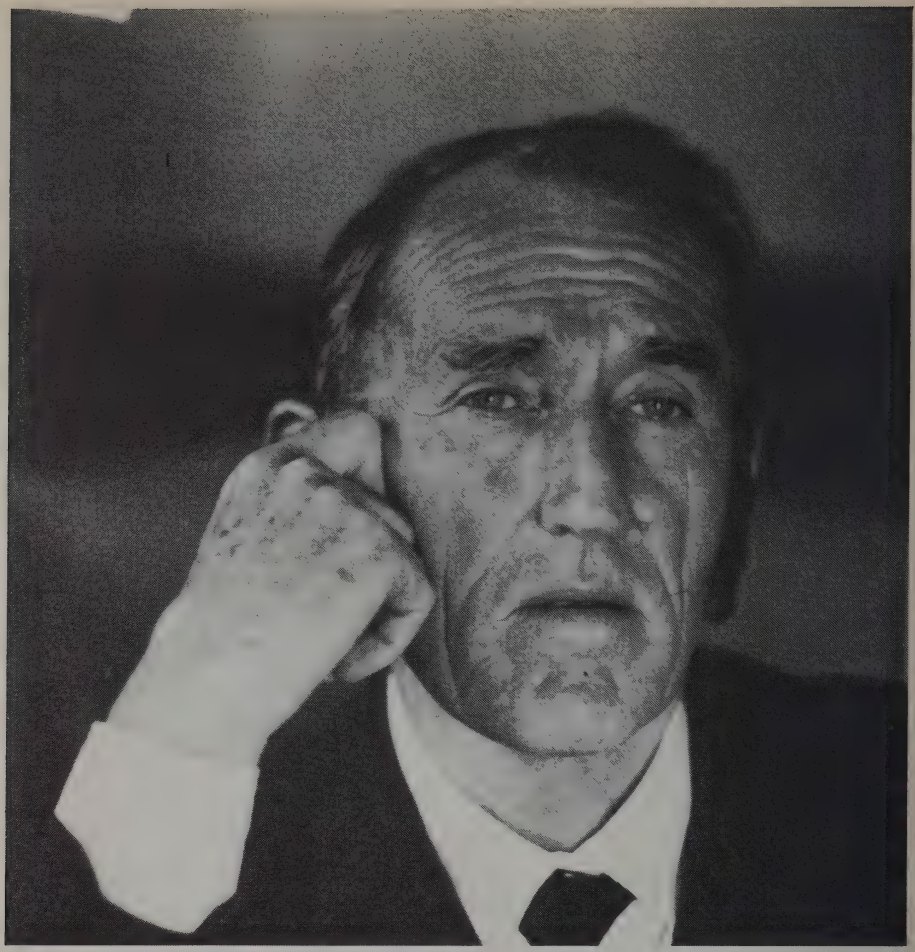
man in glasses, apparently quite different from his photographic likeness. They had tea together, Tom removed his glasses, and Wajda said yes. He asked Tom to come to London for a screen test, but really his mind was made up.



Tom Wilkinson as Ransome

The screen tests could only confirm what Wajda knew already. Even without make-up Graham Lines looked like a splendid romantic apparition. He was giving his lines a bit too much, but there was a grim seriousness about his approach which made it all acceptable. Tom Wilkinson on the other hand, facing the camera for the first time in his life, was completely natural and unforced. He was reading one of the later scenes, with the ship already anchored at Singapore. Mike Darlow was feeding him Conrad's lines. 'I beg your pardon, sir, but I would like to be sent ashore, too. Could I please be paid off?' said Tom, and Mike dried up suddenly. The question was put to him in such perfect innocence, that for a moment he was lost for an answer.

Wajda departed, leaving some minor casting problems still unsolved.



Bernard Archard as Capt. Ellis

We had failed to find Giles: someone with the right exterior and the ability to suggest a boring manner hiding an incisive intelligence. We all liked Bernard Archard, interviewed for the part, but physically he was wrong and Wajda invited him to play Ellis, the Singapore Harbour Master instead. Gordon Richardson, another Giles 'reject', was offered the bit part of the Bangkok legation doctor. In *The Shadow Line* he is described as a younger man, but Wajda thought that a rounded middle-aged figure might look more effective. Michael Darlow was going to do some screen tests for the part of Giles, and send the actors over to Warsaw on film for Wajda's final approval. Michael was also going to find an actor for the small part of the navy doctor in Singapore.

With the Polish party safely back in Warsaw, I could produce the 'definitive' English shooting script. For Thames' sake I still retained a

rehashed *Second Wind* opening. It now started with some documentary footage: a sailing ship hit by a torpedo and dying silently in flames, and a section on the German U-boat offensive and on the Q-boats. Then a scene in Conrad's Capell House study, with the old writer burning his papers and preparing to leave. Next, the intelligence report on Conrad. The opening ends with the writer on a Navy launch, being taken out of Granton harbour. The ensign in charge points out a three-masted sailing ship at anchor. 'Here is your ship, sir', he says. And we cut straight to the opening of *The Shadow Line*. We tell the whole story in continuity and at the end cut back to 1916, to the scene in Bridlington police station.

I did break the script down into single shots, but did not number them, afraid to add to the confusion. In the first week of July I was to take the script to Warsaw. Just before I left, an Equity crisis blew up. Equity were generally wary of this feature film cum television play project, and rejected the deal offered actors by Thames, which excluded residuals in line with their distribution agreement with Film Polski. I flew out with the crisis still on.

I took with me three screen-tests of the new Giles candidates. In Warsaw there was a very different crisis brewing. Daniel Olbrychski had already been announced in the Polish press as cast in the part of Conrad.

Daniel Olbrychski (*centre*) *in* The Promised Land

He was very keen to play it and started English lessons with a Warsaw-based American, working on the Conrad dialogue. Apparently he had a violent row with Barbara Pec-Slesicka and the rest of the Unit X production office, over some tapes he asked to be recorded from the

English script. Andrzej, in his usual way, pronounced himself unconcerned with the production office bickering, but suddenly he, too, developed doubts about Olbrychski's ability to play Conrad. In Poland Daniel was the romantic actor of the day. He had just played the lead in Hofman's *Deluge*, the two-part, five hours long adaptation of Sienkiewicz's novel, intimately known to every Pole. An arrogant edge had always been a part of his screen personality, but now, according to Wajda, he was so full of his success that he was only fit to play strong and confident characters. And in *The Shdaow Line* our Conrad becomes torn by doubts about his ability to command. Wajda decided, at this late hour, to screen-test Daniel, and follow it by screen-testing several other young Polish actors.

First we looked at the tests I had brought over from London. Of the three prospective Gileses Wajda liked most the one whom Michael Darlow did not recommend, but he went along with Mike's judgement and accepted Martin Wyldeck, who dried up and stammered through his test, but did it with good humour and some wit. 'In the end I have to trust somebody', said Wajda.

I had been on friendly terms with Daniel Olbrychski for many years, and for once I managed to be diplomatic, disappearing for a few days into the huge Bialovieza forest in Eastern Poland while the screen test was being shot. When I returned, after an abortive search for the wild bison, Daniel was out of the film. He did the same scene in both Polish and English, and the difference was quite striking. Olbrychski was not fluent in English at the time, and he tackled the words with a kind of rude arrogance which left little room for interpreting their meaning. In Polish he was actually acting the part, and seemed a different character altogether. But the film was going to be shot in English.

Suddenly, we were without our leading actor. Apparently, even after Warsaw gossip spread the news about, people in the business refused to believe that anyone except Daniel could play this part. He was, after all, an actor after Wajda's own heart, discovered and nurtured by him. It had to be, they decided, a feigned move, a Wajda ploy designed to keep Olbrychski on his toes.

One afternoon five Polish actors came, one by one, to the Warsaw Film Studios, to be tested for the part of young Conrad. Three of them Wajda had already worked with, two were quite unfamiliar to him. I was asked to coach them a little and to feed them lines. It was, all in all, a ridiculous occasion. They were asked to read one scene from the early part of the script and one towards the end of it, when the doctor comes abroad in Singapore. A couple could not speak a word of English, and not one of the five was fluent in it. 'Heavens! What's that?', I was saying, reading the doctor's lines. And Conrad answered, 'That is Mr. Burns, my chief officer'. DOCTOR: 'Is he going to the hospital too?' CONRAD: 'Oh, no. Mr. Burns can't go ashore till the mainmast goes. I am very proud of him. He's my only convalescent.' The second time round I stopped trying to explain that 'Mr. Burns can't go ashore till the mainmast goes' is a joke, and why it was supposed to be funny. It was difficult enough without it. Wajda decided in each case to shoot one scene in Polish as well as in English, chiefly, I believe, because playing it in Polish gave him a much more intimate insight into the performance. It resulted in a strange dichotomy. In English most of our actors went rigid struggling through their lines. In Polish, released from that burden,

they suddenly began acting with their bodies, inventing spontaneous little bits of business. In translation and in performance the words seemed to lose all their formality. Thus in moving from one language to another not only actors' personalities, but the actual theme of the scene seemed to undergo a striking change.

I made the suggestion to Wajda that the best and perhaps the only way of working the cultural duality into the texture of our film would be to write some Polish lines for Conrad and let him move occasionally between the two languages. He agreed. But for the moment the task was to find Conrad.

Wajda hesitated between two young actors, both new to him: Janusz Garlicki and Marek Kondrat. Garlicki knew the most English, and spoke the lines confidently. Wajda thought that he displayed some screen presence and an attractive, sexy glow. But he was not certain that this actor could convey the qualities of sensitivity and intelligence

Marek Kondrat

at the same time. Marek Kondrat looked and was the youngest and physically smallest of the five. In his screen-test he suggested a worried, introspective adolescent. There was little doubt about his acting ability. Marek was born into the profession: both his father and his uncle had made considerable reputations on the Polish stage. He himself at the age of ten took the lead in a children's feature. On the set the quickness of his response was almost frightening, said Wajda.

Really, we were, once again, choosing what the film was going to be about. Or rather Wajda was. With Marek Kondrat it was going to be about a Polish boy appointed to command an English ship, where everyone was bigger, tougher and more experienced than he, and where the unfriendly Chief Mate towered way above him. Wajda likes sharp contrasts, and the introduction of this boyish figure appeared to have a strong polarising influence.

He picked Marek Kondrat. Marek had recently played the lead in a contemporary film, a Polish – Czech co-production. A cutting copy was available for viewing, but Wajda refused to see it. He preferred to start without any pre-conceived notions about what the actor could or could not do.

There was some anxious news from London. The departure of the *Regina Maris* from Southampton was going to be delayed. The new projected date was 5th August, but Willoughby thought there was still a good chance they would reach the Black Sea by 1st September. The Thames board accepted the proposed co-production agreement, except that they wanted the Poles to pay half of their £10,000 towards the charter of the *Regina Maris* by 1st August. Equity were still unhappy with the project and were increasing pressure. Jolyon Wimhurst devised a compromise, which involved Film Polski agreeing to pay some sort of non-convertible, soft currency fee to the principal actors in lieu of residuals. But Mr. Braun was again away, and Mme Ciezkowska responded coldly.

Wajda refused to worry. Locations in Bulgaria had already been picked. Burgas, a Bulgarian navy port, proved to be out of bounds to foreign sailing ships. Instead Varna was going to stand in for Bangkok. Barbara was chartering a plane to fly us all there from Warsaw. Then Wajda, accompanied by Sobocinski and Barbara, made a lightning trip to the real Bangkok, stopping on the way in Moscow to pick up a heavy jade globe with a thick solid gold ring around it – the Grand Prix awarded to *The Promised Land* at the film festival which had just reached its conclusion.

Bangkok disappointed Wajda. The magnificent temples rose now out of sprawling concrete. The 1887 skyline no longer existed. But he still insisted it was an indispensible location. In truth there was no time or money to research other Far Eastern locations, so the first, unconsidered choice had to be the final one.

With the shooting schedule worked out it was time to do the budgeting and put in for the money. True, we seemed to be further than ever from agreeing on the content of the North Sea sequence, to be filmed on the Polish Baltic, but Wajda's solution was to allow a sum for it and accept it as a binding restriction. The estimated budget came to almost thirty million zlotys. (Close to £800,000 at the official rates of exchange, but more like £300–400,000 in terms of the currency's real buying power on its home market). It was going to be an expensive project.

In the last week of July I had another short talk with Wajda about the script. He suggested what seemed to me a splendidly insolent idea for the ending of *The Shadow Line*. In Joseph Conrad's *Victory* the main female character is a member of a seedy ladies' band on a permanent tour of the Far Eastern colonial centres. Wajda couldn't remember where or when he read it, but quite properly associated the ladies' band with Conrad and wondered about the feasibility of putting it into the restaurant where the young captain comes after his nightmarish journey from Bangkok and meets Giles. No sex and no girls in the entire film, and then a whole bevy in the final sequence. Two of them could converse in Polish within Conrad's earshot. I liked the idea and promised to work it in.

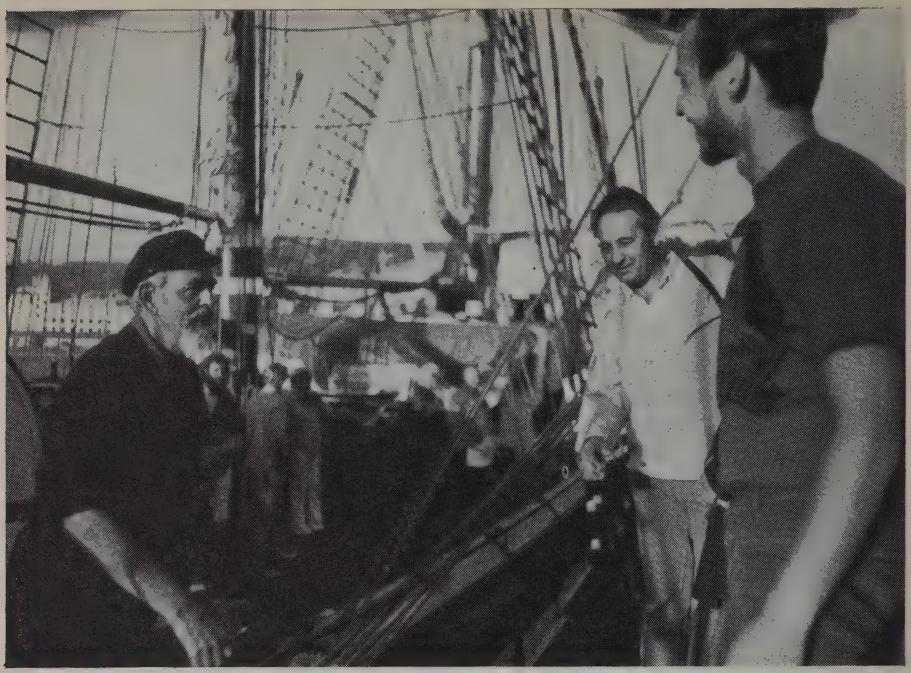
I flew to London on 1st August, with a shopping list from Allan Starski and Maria Kuminek. The situation in Euston Road was still delicate. On the same day Michael Darlow's contract with Thames to work on *The Shadow Line* started, but he preferred to withdraw from his other commitment, that of playing Hamilton, not wishing to strain the already sensitive relations with Equity. In Michael's place John Quentin was cast in the part. The shopping list I brought over from Warsaw proved to be something of an embarrassment. Jolyon Wimhurst was on the point of leaving for a short holiday in France. The production assistants in Jolyon's department were ready to help with advice, but out of union loyalty refused to handle the actual purchasing. In the end it was up to me.

I had to find old gold and cherry-red pellet fringes for the Victorian sofas and armchairs to be made in Warsaw, ornamental papers from 'Paperchase' for hat-boxes in the Chief Steward's room, and some eighty yards of large-patterned wall-paper. It was an area no nearer to my normal pre-occupations than inter-planetary exploration. I deserved – and got – some beginner's luck. In John Lewis in Oxford Street I stumbled into a barrel-full of old gold fringes – a cut price remainder of a disused line. I was congratulated on a very shrewd deal even before I left the store. I got through the other purchases in a rather less spectacular style, but safely enough.

The bulky and heavy stuff – there were some tins of the best, high-gloss British paint, door knobs and screws – was to be put on board of the *Regina Maris*, due to sail – we hoped – in a couple of days. I loaded it all into a mini-cab and went down to Southampton with it.

The ship, fully rigged and scrubbed clean, presented a more striking sight than ever before. The crew was now complete, their names and photographs sent forward to the Bulgarian authorities. But I thought I detected in Willoughby an uncertain mood. Patch Willoughby, a former model and bit-actress, now doubling up on *Regina Maris* as the purser and the cook, was serving supper to the crew. Afterwards we adjourned to a nearby pub. I think that it was then that I heard how they had come to acquire the *Regina Maris*.

Michael Willoughly, a man of many parts after he had left the Navy (he had managed a shipyard in India, designed boats and cars), had had a friend in the Fiji Islands who wanted a sailing ship to run adventure cruises for tourists in the Pacific. He asked Michael to act as a middle man. Somewhere on the western coast of Mexico Michael Willoughby found the *Regina Maris* – a wooden barquantine, built in Denmark in



Capt. Willoughby (left) with Andrzej Wajda and Marek Kondrat

1908 in the mid-nineteenth century style, complete with an ornamental Maid-of-the-Sea figurehead. She was available for sale, but having acquired her Willoughby found that his Fiji friend had meanwhile gone bankrupt. So he sailed her the other way home through the Panama canal and across the Atlantic. From quite another, second-hand source I heard that it had been an adventurous, and even a melodramatic voyage. Apparently in Latin America they picked up a couple of lady passengers and had then run into heavy weather, with the young, volunteer crew sea-sick and love-sick in equal measure.

In Britain Michael Willoughby formed a partnership with a view to exploiting the considerable charms of the *Regina Maris*. But for many months before our project no offer came. One could see, without being told in as many words, that *The Shadow Line* charter represented the first and probably the only chance of getting the laid-up ship seaworthy and operational again.

Michael Willoughby hoped to depart if not the next day, then the day after. I conveyed an urgent plea from Barbara in Warsaw that he should keep in touch throughout the voyage. Plans for putting Sobocinski with the camera on board had long been scrapped, so we would all be sitting on Black Sea beaches, waiting. Willoughby promised to send a cable to Thames in London whenever the *Regina Maris* came within radio range of land. He thought there was still a chance that with favourable wind conditions she would make Varna by the projected deadline, or a very few days later.

The *Regina Maris* did not sail the next day, or the day after, or even the week after. Apparently her auxiliary re-conditioned motor was dropped into the hold sideways, or anyway in an improper positon, and had to be taken out again. The air between Warsaw and London became jammed with angry demands, allegations and cross-allegations. Bad luck may have played a part in the delay, but it had been the uncertainty about the co-production deal that had pushed the work on the ship so close to the deadline. With the general agreement still unsigned, Thames were not keen to part with money before they saw the Poles commit themselves. When they did take the plunge, it was already late enough for any unforeseen cirumstance to throw the schedule out of gear. Besides, the ways of sailing ships were a total mystery to all of us. Everything had to be taken on trust.

£5,000 of Polish money was paid towards the charter on 5th August. But the calls from *The Shadow Line* production office were becoming even more alarmed. A plane was chartered to fly us all – the production team and the cast – to Varna on 4th September, and with every successive day it was becoming more and more unlikely that the *Regina Maris* would be able to make it to the Black Sea anywhere near that date. September in Bulgaria was the tail end of summer, and the last month of projected calm conditions. Any further delay could have disastrous consequences.

That was only one side of it. The general agreement remained still unsigned, and until it went through Unit X could not open its production account. And the Polish Ministry of Foreign Trade, to which Film Polski is accountable, queried several items in the proposed co-production document. In England Equity were up in arms again against the very principle of run-away co-productions. The actors, who wanted the work, were still not under contract, and their agents were getting restless. So far Film Polski had made no response to the compromise formula on soft currency residuals. Jolyon Wimhurst of Thames and Mr. Braun, Mr. Wrobel and Mme Ciezkowska of Film Polski were all away on holiday.

In Euston Road this headache passed on to John Edwards' deputy, Jack Davison. Jack, a ginger-haired Scot, managed to keep his unruffled manner largely, I think, because there was no time for him to enter into the desperate chaos of it all. In Poland Mr. Wrobel was recalled from his holiday to deal with the crisis. But it was essentially a holding, telex and telephone operation until Jolyon and Mr. Braun returned. Meanwhile, some political pressure was being applied in Warsaw to clear the path for the last minute agreement.

Jolyon Wimhurst returned, and the *Regina Maris* finally sailed away, on 17th August. After some more furious telephoning it was decided that Jolyon would fly to Warsaw in the last week of August, hopefully to sign the agreement. The Poles were now willing to consider paying a soft currency fee to British actors. Unit X put off the chartered flight to the Black Sea till 11th September. I was going to fly in on 4th September, to be followed a few days later by Michael Darlow, Graham Lines and Tom Wilkinson.

Not a word reached us from the *Regina Maris*. In the Polish plane I picked up a copy of *Trybuna Ludu*. There was a short report on the front page about the signing of a co-production agreement between Film Polski and Thames Television, represented by Mr. Jolyon Wimhurst,

to make a film about Joseph Conrad, under the direction of Andrzej Wajda.

CHAPTER VII

The Unfriendly Elements

The Unit X car met me at the airport, and drove straight to *The Shadow Line* production office at the Warsaw film studios. Andrzej Wajda was waiting there. He had asked me to bring the English text of Conrad's *A Smile of Fortune*, and now he explained why. He felt that there was a weakness in the middle of *The Shadow Line*, because we never find out what kind of business preoccupied Conrad in Bangkok while Burns was ill in the legation hospital. *A Smile of Fortune*, subtitled 'a harbour story', is all about a captain's business on land, and Wajda hoped to borrow a scene or two from it.

So the script was still going to be tinkered with, even at this late stage. In a way, I minded it less now. I had always thought that the scriptwriter's duties should continue while the cameras turn. Ideally, the writer ought to be present on the set, working with the director, always prepared to re-shape the scene, to cut the lines or to expand them.

My other, undefined duties, were also going to be continued. I missed Jolyon in Warsaw by a day, and before I left the production office he telephoned. News had reached him that the *Regina Maris* had run straight into unfavourable weather, and had taken ten days to get out of the English Channel. That was serious. Andrzej and Barbara conferred briefly, and decided to put off the chartered flight to Varna for another week, and to start shooting some bits and pieces on Polish locations, in and around Warsaw. Wajda wanted to begin with Conrad's and Giles' night walk down a shaded alley in Singapore, on their way to the jetty.

The start was brought forward to Tuesday, 9th September, allowing us one clear working week in Warsaw, before departing for the Black Sea. But it meant a rash re-arrangement of the shooting schedule. Martin Wyldeck was needed on Tuesday, and we had to find out if he would be available.

There is no direct dialling telephone system between Poland and Great Britain, and for some reason connections from London to Warsaw are much easier than in the reverse. In Warsaw it is not uncommon to wait four or five hours. One is often reduced to pleading the urgency of one's cause with the girls of the international exchange. Whether it was through lack of the knack, or the customary mischievousness of mechanical devices, the lines to London proved jammed when we wanted them open most urgently.

I spent most of Friday by the telephone. Martin Wyldeck was available and there was a ticket for him ready to be picked up in the Polish Air Line office in London. He would be flying in on Tuesday. I asked for a message to be passed on to him about which scene we were going to shoot, and said that there would be very little time for rehearsing.

Some of the problems we would have to overcome, or live with during the shooting, were only now becoming clear. Most of them stemmed from the lack of fluent English in the Polish production team.

In the office there was only one young assistant, Andrzej Swat, who knew some English – enough for a bit of socialising, but apt to break down whenever more stringent demands were put on it. Perhaps because I had always been available – in Warsaw or at the London end of the line – no one had thought that the primary need was for an expert interpreter in the production office, familiar with film terms and procedures. In fact, there was a curious blockage on this point, a reluctance to remember that we were actually making an English film. Two buzzing, energetic ladies serving as Wajda's second and third assistants, responsible, among other things, for continuity, were heaving the bulky old Polish shooting script around, strewn with mistakes and containing gaps. The script we were actually making the film on was not accessible to them. Wajda's first Polish assistant, Zbyszek Kaminski, did know some English. He was a quiet, soft-spoken, reticent young man, a budding film maker of considerable promise, with mature ideas about the medium, but not the man to stamp his personality this on production.

But for the moment, in the initial week's shooting on Warsaw locations, we were making the film not from the script, but from fluttering single pages, hastily typed by me and handed round to actors to learn their lines, to Wajda, Zbyszek Kaminski and Michael Darlow, who arrived at the weekend. The new, as yet unwritten *Smile of Fortune* scenes were scheduled for immediate shooting, before Bulgaria. There were two likely passages, one in the ship-chandlers office, the other at the local merchant's. The Captain is short of quarter-bags for loading his cargo, and they don't seem to be available anywhere.

The scenes adapted fairly easily, but I was having doubts about the wisdom of including them in *The Shadow Line*. The need for these additions arose because of what I considered Andrzej Wajda's over-literal approach to the adaptation. Conrad's story is really highly condensed, full of swift generalisations as well as detail. I had argued for equally bold selectivity in our cinematic approach. Occasionally, Andrzej seemed to be taking my point, only to return again to the untypical, for him, determination to put everything on the screen, to explain everything, to leave no gaps in the story. When you look for gaps to be plugged, you are bound to find some. And when you succeed in plugging one, you're likely to open a few more.

In *The Shadow Line* Conrad chose not to divert readers' attention to the captain's messy business on shore. It was decided to repair his omission, out of loyal respect for him. Superficially, the *Smile of Fortune* scenes fitted in neatly enough. By making Burns responsible for the cargo trouble, we seemed to be strengthening the emerging antagonism between him and the young captain. Conrad's Bangkok days now consisted of wary business talks with corrupt local merchants, and dutiful visits to the legation hospital, where the Mate, whose lack of acumen had caused this mess, lay feverish and malignant. But the stronger and more effective this subplot became, the greater the secondary problems of how to conclude it. The quarter-bags had to be found somehow, and the solution should be swift and non-arbitrary, so that the ship's departure would not be delayed. It proved desperately difficult. In the end we decided to defer this problem till the Black Sea, and shoot the two scenes scheduled for Warsaw.

Tuesday 9th September arrived. Our first location was Ujazdowski park in the middle of Warsaw. In Conrad's description the impression is of a deserted alley, with no other people about except Conrad and Giles, a couple of coolies some way in front carrying Conrad's luggage slung from a long pole, and a single Malay policeman. But in this case Wajda's fondness for Hollywood proved to be greater than his respect for the original Conrad text. About a hundred young ladies and gentlemen assembled in the Warsaw studio, dressed with ostentatiously Victorian elegance, and Warsaw's Vietnamese student community was plundered for coloured extras. A lorry-full of palm trees arrived in the park, and bulbous Chinese lanterns were hanging from branches. Marek Kondrat, unnaturally neat and tidy in his costume, wandered along the studio corridors, whispering in English.

We were all waiting for Martin Wyldeck. Andrzej Swat, who went to meet him at the airport, returned alone. The plane was delayed.

Martin Wyldeck (left) as Giles, with Andrzej Wajda

Airport information said it was still on the ground in London. We managed to get through to Euston Road: the Polish plane, we learned, had developed a technical fault. They were working on it, but the flight could well be cancelled. Hours passed. According to the schedule we were due on the location by seven, and at four p.m. Wajda was on the point of calling everything off. Then a call came through that the plane at Heathrow had finally got off the ground. The costume people were standing by, and arrangements were made to rush Martin Wyldeck through the customs.

He arrived at 6.30, tired and hungry. It transpired that he didn't know he would be expected to work at once, because a message saying that he could have a couple of days rest in Warsaw after the night's shooting was somehow conveyed to him in reverse. Perhaps he was too dazed to protest. He was wedged into some ill-fitting clothes, (because of the re-scheduling, his own costume wasn't ready yet), while being fed with a sandwich and a cup of black Polish coffee, I pushed a couple of loose pages into his hand, and he was driven to the Ujazdowski Park mumbling the lines he didn't know, with Mike Darlow in concerned assistance.

The scene had been devised as a single, extremely long track, with a varied, mobile background. It was very difficult to achieve, but the actual content of the shot seemed to me rather uninteresting. Basically it was a walking two-shot of Conrad and Giles, which did the same job as in any conventional dialogue take on television. Except that here there was the glow of Chinese lanterns in the dim background, dozens of period figures moving about, and a galloping carriage with a sprawling Victorian beauty at the back crossed the men's path. The tracks were laid on the street side of the Park, and the topography of the place proved awkward. The camera angle forced the actors to walk fairly widely apart. In the script, half-way through the scene, Conrad gets irritated by a Giles remark and purposely quickens his pace, making his elderly and stout companion pant with the effort to keep up. But some apparently insoluble camera-angle and lighting problems in the end forced Wajda to ask Martin to walk half a pace in front of Marek. It made complete nonsense of that little piece of business between the two characters. The timing of the carriage run and other background action forced a very different tempo of dialogue from the one Mike Darlow had carefully rehearsed with Marek Kondrat and – over the last half an hour – with Martin Wyldeck. Mike was desperately trying, with my help, to keep up with what was happening, but the procedures between him and Wajda had never been properly worked out in advance. Trying to do it now only added to the chaos.

Naturally, all this rebounded on the actors. Martin, the old pro, battled gamely enough, though, not surprisingly, kept drying up. Marek suffered even more. It was the first time he had acted in a foreign language, a language he still wasn't fluent in. He knew his lines, but when he had to cope with several sentences at one go, and speak them fast, one could sense the sheer physical effort required. And when he was asked to accelerate, on top of all the other pressures of the moment, the unhappiness showed through. He couldn't relax, and in the end he also started drying up.

One difficult moment for them came towards the end of their little walk. They approach two coolies squatting on their heels, resting Conrad's luggage on the ground. Giles changes the subject.

GILES: I expect you'll have your hands full
of tangled up business.
CONRAD: What makes you think so?
GILES: My general experience of this world. The ship
a long time away from her port, owners inaccessible
by cable, and the Captain, the only man who

could explain matters, dead and buried. And you, yourself new to the business in a way.

CONRAD: I know it only too well. I only wish you could impart to me some small portion of your experience before I go. As it can't be done in ten minutes I had better not begin to ask you. But I won't feel really at peace till I have that ship of mine out in the Indian Ocean.

GILES: A pretty long step, from Bangkok to the Indian Ocean. . . .

During that exchange they stop, while the camera continues to track for a second to open a wider angle, and Conrad gives a silent sign to the coolies to pick up the luggage. The action had to be rehearsed very carefully, the dialogue was difficult to pace and control, and first one, then the other actor would dry up or mess up his lines. In the end the walk was split into two takes, and the Giles good-bye shot separately.

It couldn't be considered an encouraging start. The only people who enjoyed it were the Warsaw passers-by who stopped to watch. But it became cold and rather misty, so even they moved on.

But we had made a start. *The Shadow Line* was in production. Wajda, restless but in better humour than before the shooting, was complaining a little about having to start the film in this way, with random bits and pieces. Normally, he said, he likes to open with a substantial sequence, working his way through it to the style for the whole piece. And it did look very much as if he wasn't sure of his way yet. Each one of the scenes shot on Warsaw locations was approached differently. I wasn't able to accompany him to all the locations, because I was adjusting and typing out the script from day to day, but I was there for the ship-chandler scene and for Conrad's two visits to the legation hospital. The ship-chandler's location was in the country just outside Warsaw – the rather run-down summer residence of a pre-war industrialist. It had a large verandah at the back, in what could be termed, in the context of our project, a colonial style. Wajda was working out the mechanics of the scene on the spot. He decided to use all of the available space, put two Polish bit players in the far corner of the verandah for some background chat, and Conrad with the manager on the opposite side, with the manager paying only half-hearted attention to the young captain while straining to hear what the others are saying. This general scheme was being filled in with actors' business, with everyone free to contribute. There was one complete master shot and normal coverage of detail. At last there was a glimpse of a theatrical imagination at work and of Wajda's authority on the set.

The two hospital scenes (originally there was only one in the script, but it was another last moment decision to split it and develop it as two) were shot in the hastily dressed up interior of the Warsaw Art School – at one time a convent. Witold Sobocinski came into his own there. With only a few lights and little fuss he managed to light beautifully a wide area, getting across a sense of stifling heat and the bluish tones of the gas lamps. Obviously, he was going to prove one of our key assets. Wajda went this time for rather exotic set-ups, composing one general

shot in the aggressively artificial style of Ken Russell, with a bald-headed orderly in the foreground.

For the first time tensions between the differing aesthetic positions emerged into the open. Graham Lines, in white theatrical make-up, gripped by shivering fits, looked impressively ghoulish but rather in danger of going over the top. Yet Wajda kept pushing him towards greater histrionic expressiveness. Graham tried to oblige, but all his natural British acting instincts were against it. So were Mike's, who was deploring the loss of subtle detail in the performance, and, curiously, Marek Kondrat seemed to be joining the same aesthetic camp. He was the representative of a new, rising generation of Polish actors, who were reacting strongly against the dominating Wajda influence on Polish screens, and the flamboyantly theatrical acting style that went with it. They were more interested in restrained naturalism and technical excellence.

In the single scene there were several instances of this clash of attitudes. Sometimes Wajda withdrew and accepted another suggestion, sometimes he pushed through his own ideas. Graham Burns, pleading with Conrad to be taken aboard, in a fit of panic tries to raise himself from the pillow:

BURNS: If you leave me behind in this deadly place
I shall die. I feel it, I'm certain of it.
You won't have the heart to leave me ashore,
will you? I have a wife and a child in Sydney.
I'll die. I'll die here. . . . !

As he says it, Wajda made him catch hold of Conrad's lapel, both to support himself and as the physical expression of the wild panic that is gripping him. We shot it this way, but afterwards both Mike and Graham became unhappy, because they believed that no British sailor, even malignant, could behave in such a way towards his superior officer.

In another take, referring to the second hospital visit, Burns is rambling on in a dreadful whisper:

BURNS: You have hated me from the start. The late
Captain hated me too. He wished me
dead, wished all hands dead. . . . What do
you want to stand in with that wicked corpse
for, sir? He'll have you too. . . .

Wajda intended to set up for a wide shot of this moment that would include a patient in the next bed writhing in the horrible convulsions of agony. An extra was already tucked in, ready to do his stuff. But Mike and I, and Zbyszek Kaminski, argued that it would make an irrelevant, damaging diversion. Wajda withdrew.

Despite these tensions I felt encouraged. The different cultural attitudes were partly – I was thinking – what this film should be about. There was a certain incongruity about the whole project: Joseph Conrad had been a Pole who became a great English writer; his books, translated back into Polish, made him famous in his country of origin, and

now, a top Polish director was making an English film about him in Poland. The aesthetic clash between the English belief in controlled understatement and Wajda's striving after sheer visual vehemence could be seen as a part of the same confusion, of this insane leaping, there and back, across a cultural divide. I felt hopeful that some of this insanity would find its way into the texture of the film, to enrich and invigorate it.

However, the prospects for culture clashes in the production office were less hopeful. The new British arrivals were naturally a bit bewildered, insecure and sometimes suspicious about Polish ways. There were a lot of people in the office, and a certain air of chaos and improvisation prevailed. Procedures seemed to be made up from day to day and basic communications between the two cultural blocks too often depended on whether I happened to be around. On the first day location Graham and Tom, the two actors, and Mike came along just to get the feel of it and found to their distress that there was no regular lunch break and no food provided. During a natural break in the shooting the Poles took out their sandwiches, while the British looked on. Call sheets, pick-up cars and actual hours of work seemed a matter of luck rather than routine. Michael, feeling it was up to him to protect his actors, made a strong protest to Barbara. But when he got on to the British union rules and suggested that they applied on this co-production, she laughed. Not out of any intended viciousness; she found it uproarious that, for instance, Martin Wyldeck in his unfortunate Tuesday night-shoot experience was actually breaking Equity rules which insist on a day's rest before work for an actor on any foreign location, and theoretically ran the risk of being suspended in his union rights for this misdemeanor. And she refused to take seriously the threat that the English actors would walk out unless some attention was paid to their habits in the matter of lunch breaks, taking food and hours of work. I tried to explain the potential gravity of this, and after I had a word with Wajda, the situation improved. Tensions in the same areas recurred later, but by that time most British members of the team acquired some tolerance and understanding of Polish ways, and – in one or two cases – even some apparent liking for them.

Not Michael Darlow, whose righteous anger at the inefficiency of the production office was apt to be extended to its private, or semi-private habits. Such as the institution, and ritual, of the office 'telephone'. A fair amount of gentle day-time boozing goes on in the production offices of most Polish feature films. A whip-round produces sufficient zlotys for a bottle or two. The procedure is known as 'a telephone'. Little glasses of vodka or Soviet brandy are placed in open drawers, which can be slammed shut whenever someone undesirable appears in the door. If your standing with the production office was good, you could even be called to a telephone from the set, and find on arrival it was an alcoholic connection you were being offered.

18th September arrived. There had been no further news from the *Regina Maris*, but Jolyon Wimhurst in London assumed that she was somewhere in the Eastern Mediterranean, making her way towards Varna with all speed. We were flying there to meet her, and to start the really serious work. The Warsaw shooting seemed a spurious start, emotionally unsatisfactory. The mood was optimistic in our chartered plane. Barbara, glowing with good will towards all – the Poles, the

British and the mongrels – was trying to achieve the democratic miracle of feeding fifty people from a single bottle of Georgian brandy. It was somewhat less democratic at the Varna airport. A black saloon car was waiting to pick up Wajda, Krystyna Zachwatowicz and Barbara, a VW for the leading actors, Mike Darlow, Sobocinski and the scriptwriter, and a coach for the workers.

Our base was to be in Albena, a sea-side resort some twenty miles north of Varna, planned and built over the last ten or twelve years among chalky hills, in a wide valley opening onto the sea. A row of tall, pyramidal structures descended down to the beach. The resort was designed to cater for foreign tourism, preferably from the West, and during the summer season hotels accepted no bookings from inside the country. The only Bulgarians on view were waiters, receptionists and shop assistants. It felt like a timeless and inhuman place, an Aztec city unearthed intact and crawling with bored invaders.

The leading actors, Wajda, Mike, Barbara and I were put up in one of those pyramidal hotels on the beach, but the crew and the production office were a mile inland. A Bulgarian element was now added to the co-production. Apparently a pre-condition of the deal was that all the financial arrangements were to be handled by the Bulgarians, who would be on the production payroll. They were also responsible for transport and communications. The new procedure was to communicate any request to the Polish production office, who would pass it on to the Bulgarians, who would then mess it up. Seen from Albena, *The Shadow Line* production office in Warsaw looked austerely efficient.

At last we had time to discuss and rehearse the film, to take a final look at the script and tie up all the loose ends, and to organise ourselves properly for the shooting. It was Thursday afternoon when we reached Albena. The *Regina Maris* was expected to reach Varna some time during the weekend, and we hoped to start shooting on Monday. We met in Wajda's apartment on Friday morning; the three actors, Mike Darlow, Zbyszek Kaminski and I. The official language was English, although Wajda preferred me to interpret for him. He proposed that over the next couple of days we talk about the characters and their relationship, then read the screen-play scene by scene, arguing it through. He made it clear that no holds were to be barred, that everything was still open to change.

Discussion of the character of Conrad revolved mainly around the fact of his Polish background – one of my pet pre-occupations. This was the only original measure, the only departure from the Conrad text we allowed ourselves. The author, though he called *The Shadow Line* his 'confession' and insisted on its autobiographical character, omitted, and, indeed, disguised this fact in the story. But the moment you redress this omission, the story, at least in its opening part, takes on an added meaning. The strange business with Hamilton, Conrad's prospective rival for the command, suddenly becomes clear. Hamilton's contempt for the young officer – he actually calls him 'a rank outsider' – makes sense when we know that Conrad is a foreigner and speaks English with a pronounced accent. Conrad's touchiness and Giles' good-natured promoting of him gain a much clearer focus.

In the film we wanted to make Conrad's background quite explicit. A parcel from home was suggested – I can't even remember who put up the idea first – containing a letter from his uncle in the Ukraine and

some magazines. The opening of the parcel in the Officer's Home and the reading of the letter would make an additional scene. I also suggested that on board Conrad would start talking to himself in Polish, and being caught out by Burns, looking at him through the door in surprised amusement, he translates mechanically into English: 'It's like being bewitched, upon my word.'

Conrad's foreign background deepens the isolation that the command brings. But his conflict with the Mate is also the confrontation of an educated, rational awareness with the naturally superstitious imagination of a born sailor. On a ship, the captain has to assert not only his will, but his way of looking at the world. And on this ship, Conrad's rationalism seems artificial, doesn't explain anything, while Burns' wild rambling fits in simply with the pattern of accidents.

Ransome was a separate, and in a way the more difficult, problem. He had very few meaningful lines in the story, while in action he never put a foot wrong. He was a too-good-to-be-true figure. Yet he seemed to be Wajda's favourite character, perhaps because Conrad sketched him so uncertainly. Wajda's advice to Tom Wilkinson was to play Ransome with complete freedom, to give him his own physical presence and personal mannerisms. Wajda obviously hoped that he had found in Tom the kind of intuitive actor who could claim the part, identify with it, give it not only a physical clarity but some emotional temperature of his own.

We spent most of Friday discussing the characters, and reassembled on Saturday morning to read the screen-play from the moment Conrad steps on the deck of his ship. We were going to rehearse the entire journey, exteriors and interiors alike. We were well into the day's work when the phone rang. Marek Kondrat was nearest to it and picked it up. He listened, looked across at us and gave the thumbs down sign, before passing the receiver to Wajda. It was a message – Marek said – from a Varna telex, that the *Regina Maris* had been holed and damaged in a gale in the Western Mediterranean. She was now in Sardinia. Surely, that was the end of the project.

Andrzej was speaking to someone at the other end. 'Don't let on about it, keep it to yourself. We are going ahead. We start shooting in two days.' He replaced the receiver and turned to us. Calmly and firmly he repeated the same request: 'Please don't talk to anyone about it outside this room. We start shooting in a couple of days'. He sat down and smiled, to himself rather than to us. 'There', he said, 'I behaved like Joseph Stalin!'

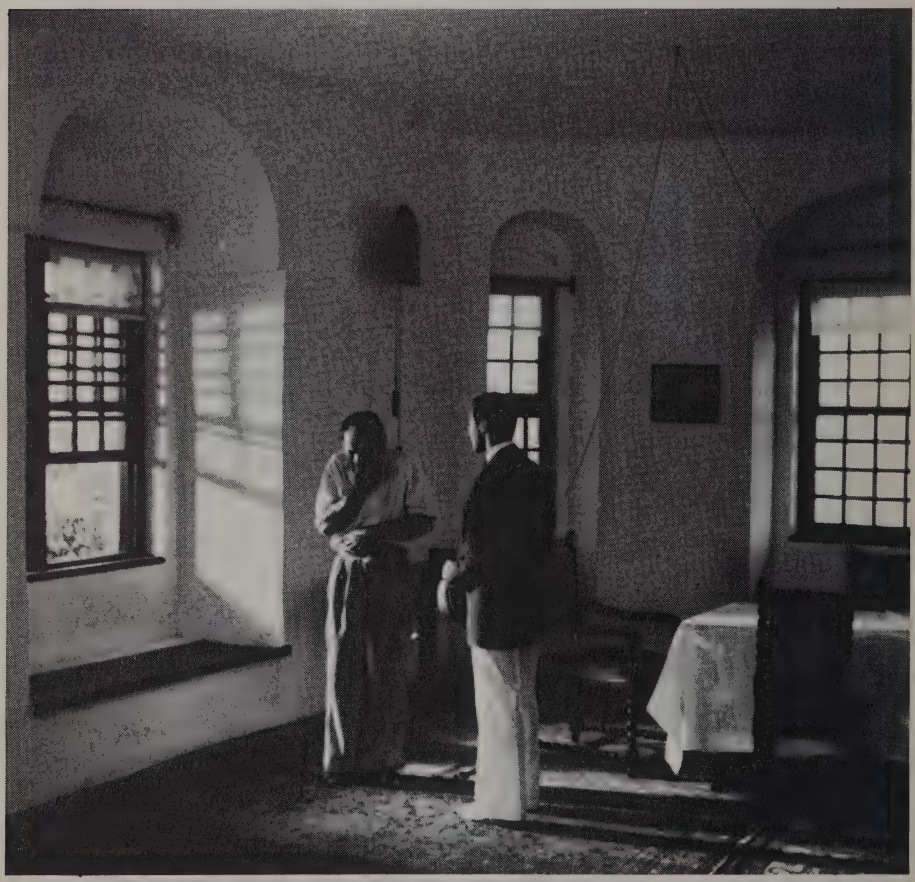
We actually continued rehearsing, although first Wajda and then Mike left us. Communications with London were much more difficult than in Poland, but during the evening more news came through from Jolyon. He didn't know how bad the damage was, but he was trying to charter a tug to tow the *Regina Maris* all the way to the Black Sea. Providing the ship was in fair shape and they did not run into another gale, they could reach Varna in a fortnight.

Wajda's emergency plan was to transfer the Officers' Home sequences from the Warsaw studio to some suitable location in Bulgaria. It was going to be heartbreakingly difficult, but the plan offered the best prospects of saving the project. Leaving Bulgaria and returning to Warsaw would in effect mean inviting the authorities to cancel it. Wajda quite openly admitted the existence of strong 'political' motives

in his determination to carry on. There was a certain impudence in this project, in making an English film with Polish resources, and his Warsaw critics and enemies were waiting for a slip-up. Fighting to save the film, he was really fighting for his own 'political' position.

In this crisis the strength of Wajda's professional relationship with Barbara was revealed. For her it would have been 'politically' safer to abandon the project and blame the British partner for it. Desperately unhappy about the situation, she nevertheless fought to save it, out of staunch loyalty to Wajda. The problems were colossal. The rescheduling meant a re-allocation of resources, and a heavy increase in demand for Bulgarian currency. This in itself called for a complex political operation. Then all the heavy props had to be brought over from Warsaw in a chartered plane – there were no Victorian antiques in Bulgaria. A suitable location found and dressed up, all in the space of a few days.

Jolyon Wimhurst was fighting to save the project at the British end.



the Chief Steward (John Bennett) and Conrad (Marek Kondrat) in the Officers' Home

The news from him was getting more hopeful. A Dutch tug had accepted the charter and was already within radio range of the *Regina Maris*. Jolyon himself was coming over to Albena.

A location was found in Balchik, only a few miles up the coast from Albena. It was the one-time summer residence of a Romanian queen, overlooking the sea, surrounded by terraced gardens. A turret on top was hardly colonial Singapore, but there were useful verandahs on two sides of the villa, and the tall, roomy interiors proved adaptable. Allan Starski moved to Balchik, interrupting his work on the Varna waterfront.

Jolyon arrived with Penny, and we could learn at least some facts about the *Regina Maris*. Apparently she had run into unseasonal weather and had been blown back by adverse gales. She had shipped a lot of water which put her motors and her radio out of action and made communication impossible. From Sardinia Michael Willoughby had telephoned Jolyon to say that he wasn't going to make it and after repairs he was turning back. Jolyon pleaded with him to wait, while he battled at Thames to persuade his superiors not to cancel the project and cut the losses. In fact the decision to cancel was reversed half a day later, on condition that money for the tug was coming from Jolyon Wimhurst's own annual budget.

Wajda was business-like and rather friendly towards Jolyon. He decided that they were allies in adversity. There were remonstrances from Barbara, who blamed Thames for what she considered the naïve terms of the *Regina Maris* charter (the owners stood to lose nothing by the failure of the ship to reach Varna) and for her late departure. Jolyon himself seemed remarkably cool and relaxed under all the pressure.

All this time we were continuing rehearsals and script discussions, with Jolyon now taking part as well. The resolution to the Bangkok business sub-plot occupied a lot of our attention. We played with the idea of making the providential Ransome responsible for finding the necessary quarter-bags, but it seemed an artificial intrusion into the structure of the Conrad story. Finally, I added an arbitrary little scene with Jacobus, the merchant whom Conrad had earlier left in an angry rage, coming round with the quarter-bags. Conrad walks in on his way from the hospital, to find the ship already being loaded.

Mike Darlow was now spending a lot of time with Marek, taking him through the Officers' Home scenes. Other British actors started arriving. John Bennett came with Jack Davison of Thames late one evening, both tired and unfriendly. Through a typical confusion with our Bulgarian hosts no car had been sent to the airport and they had had to find their own way. Jack Davison carried a pocket-full of cash to pay the harbour dues and fees – the Bulgarians were refusing to accept soft currency for the *Regina Maris*. Martin Wyldeck returned – an old hand now in these Polish emergencies, and John Quentin came to play Hamilton.

Shooting started in Balchik four days after the alarming news about the *Regina Maris* had reached us. On the creative side we seemed to be much better organised now than at any time in Warsaw. Mike Darlow had done a lot of useful preparatory work with actors. Andrzej left the interpretation of the actual text entirely to him, talking to the new actors about their parts only in terms of character and temperament. In the evening or early in the morning of each day the three of us –

Wajda, Darlow and myself – would hold a short conference. Wajda would explain the next day's takes, drawing all the camera set-ups (for the first time since leaving film school, he said) and actors' movements. In the morning we would all go to the location, where Mike was taking the actors through their paces while Wajda was busy with Witek Sobocinski. I would stay for the camera rehearsals and perhaps for a take or two and then rush back to Albena, to my never-ending tinkering with the script. Occasionally Wajda would still change his mind on the set, but now, with the home-work properly done, Mike could follow what was happening. His frustrations, which had been reaching a shrill pitch a few days earlier, were subsiding.

One minor character – an officer of the Rajah's yacht – who never in the script says a coherent word, was giving us some curious problems. Wajda asked the Warsaw production office to send a Polish actor over to play the part, and they put on the plane Janusz Garlicki, the personable young 'Conrad reject'. The character was a young Englishman who had let himself go, and after tasting some untold, sinful and destructive pleasures of the East, was incoherent and supine, visibly disintegrating. Garlicki was quite unsuitable. Heavily made up for the part he looked like a Christmas pantomime ghost. During the morning drive to the location Wajda confided this problem to us, and I suggested only half seriously that Jolyon Wimhurst, with his sometimes indolent postures, and some spark of nobility flickering through them, would be well cast in the part. Everybody – Wajda, Krystyna his wife, and Mike – revelled in the idea. Mike was quickly dispatched back to persuade Jolyon to do it, and apparently met with little resistance. While Wajda was lining up the first take, a word came that Jolyon was being made up and dressed. He would soon be on his way to the location. But Garlicki was already there, waiting for the take. Wajda, working feverishly on the set, was glancing back despairingly over his shoulder, expecting Jolyon to show up at any moment and come face to face with Garlicki. Yet he could not bring himself to tell Garlicki he would not be needed, nor try to call Jolyon off. I could not believe my eyes. This was the man who in a real crisis was always cool and swiftly decisive. But he suddenly left the set, shouted at me to follow, and marched to the car with short, stubbing steps so quickly that with my much longer legs I could hardly keep up. We drove to the production base where Jolyon was waiting, made up as the man who had known everything and stopped caring. Wajda embraced him, told him he looked wonderful and had got the part, and that he was now free to change and wash the stuff off his face. It took another day and an additional scene written by me for Garlicki (which was shot but edited out of the film) to solve this diplomatic problem.

The *Regina Maris* came on tow to Varna, a couple of days ahead of schedule just as I was on the point of leaving. Wajda said he regretted I had to go and asked me to come back to Warsaw, for the studio shooting. There were no seats on flights from Varna and I was driven to Burgas early in the morning. The sun was rising over the Varna harbour. There was no wind and a purple mist was lifting from the water. There she was – the *Regina Maris*, the first rays of sun playing in her rigging. She looked unreal. I felt a pang of regret at going away.

CHAPTER VIII

On The Wrong-Way-Round Set in Warsaw

It was by no means the end of the problems with the *Regina Maris*. Back in London reports were reaching me through the Euston Road office of arguments with the port authorities and tensions between Wajda and Capt. Willoughby. Then Jolyon came back with some stories, and Mike Darlow left Albena to confer in London about the increasingly mythical British location shooting. David Naden, the editor, flew from Warsaw to Varna to strengthen the British presence, to be in turn relieved by Udi Eichler from Thames in London.

Udi seems to have been an instant hit with all the Poles in Albena. He is of middle-European origin. He comes from Vienna, which

Udi Eichler of Thames Television (left) with Andrzej Wajda

culturally is not all that close to Poland, but has had a long tradition of physical contact with it. Whether because of this, or the extrovert warmth of his own temperament, there was apparently none of that awkwardness between him and the Poles which had affected some of the other Polish – British relationships. Everybody, starting with Wajda, through Barbara and her production assistants, to the camera crew, loved Udi and regretted his eventual departure.

But then Udi is a fixer extraordinary. Any problem which has a human origin Udi can fix. He acted as a go-between on board the *Regina Maris*, filtering Wajda's requests to Willoughby, and Willoughby's objections to Wajda, using his powers of persuasion when necessary. He managed to lower the tensions and made the *Regina Maris* perform all the manoeuvres which were at all possible, safe and cinematically beneficial – which apparently had not been the case before

the Bangkok waterfront set

Udi's arrival. Unfortunately he could not fix God. In the end Wajda proved rather better at it.

Before I left Albena the weather had been glorious. There were cloudless skies and no wind. Most days, especially before noon, the sea had that glistening, oily look we needed for our becalmed sequences. But the Bulgarians were muttering ominously that the weather could well change in the first days of October.

Burns on deck during the storm

It did. A huge storm broke out on the night before Allan Starski's Bangkok waterfront sets were due to be filmed, with the *Regina Maris* in the background. In the morning, a message reached Albena that the sets had been blown down. Apparently Wajda drove down to Varna, took one look at the wrecked structure, with only bits of it still standing up, and said calmly, 'We start shooting in an hour and a half.' Then he busied himself looking for the camera angles that would keep the wreckage out of frame.

The temperature dropped and it continued blowing. The sea stayed rough day and night. When shooting started on the deck of the *Regina Maris*, Wajda got badly sea-sick going out in a boat, even before he reached the ship. Allegedly he was getting ready to direct from the beach, sending out instructions by boat. But before it ever got to that, all the actors on the deck got sea-sick as well, and shooting had to be cancelled. A lot of work on the deck was in fact done in the port, with the ship safely moored and the camera looking out. Later the weather improved sufficiently for some shooting to be done out at sea, but it was still far from the calm conditions that were essential. In the last week of October only Wajda kept relaxed, assuring everyone that it would be all right in the end. Three days before the *Regina Maris* was due to sail the wind dropped, and the sea calmed down sufficiently for the necessary shots to be taken.

Back in London I was trying to solve with Jolyon Wimhurst the problem of the introduction to the film. It became desperately urgent to know what, if anything, we were going to put at the front and at the end of it. The *Second Wind* 'frame' had been dead for some time, and past resurrection. In Albena, while waiting for the ship to arrive, Wajda had finally decided not to proceed with the Baltic shooting. His official arguments were always the same: the formal clarity of *The Shadow Line* would not admit any foreign elements; but I suspect that the prospect of shooting in the winter waters of the Baltic had contributed to the force of that argument. But he still believed there was a case for an introductory sequence that would make Conrad's Polish origins explicit.

For a time he toyed with the idea of braving Polish censorship and bringing back the Cossacks: Conrad's childhood memory of a sombre farewell on the steps of his uncle's Ukrainian manor, with the Russian police waiting to take the child and his mother back into exile*. I supported him in this. After all, I had put that scene into an early draft of *Second Wind*. But Wajda dropped the idea before we could get attached to it. He thought it would be too static and not explicit enough. He also rejected my suggestion of devising an opening sequence about old Conrad visiting Poland in 1914 with his English family and trapped there by the outbreak of World War I. It sounded too complex, and Wajda wanted now just a brief, metaphorical prelude. My next idea was to adapt the passage from Conrad's *A Personal Record* about his first glimpse of a live Englishman up in the Alpine pass†. I hoped that it would carry an ironic hint – taking Conrad at his own word – that anyone who at the age of fifteen could make up his mind to become an Englishman, and then stick stubbornly to this resolution throughout his life, would have been ready to tackle any other improbably reckless endeavour. I wrote this sequence, with Jolyon's and Mike Darlow's encouragement, and sent a Polish synopsis to Andrzej in Albena. He squashed it, in a telephone conversation. He thought, curiously, that the sequence sounded too romantically flamboyant for the film he was now making.

It was a cold and foggy morning of 3rd November when Jolyon, Michael and myself reached Warsaw on a night train from Poznan,

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* See 'Prologue'

† See 'Prologue'

where our flight had been diverted. Only a day earlier Wajda had flown in from Bulgaria with the remainder of the crew. We conferred briefly in the afternoon about the problem of the opening. Wajda came to the not wholly unexpected conclusion that the film would be better without it. All he now proposed to do was to put at the front some stills of the exotic Berdyczow convent where the baby Conrad had been christened, and photographs of him from childhood to old age in England, throwing in the *Otago* and some other ships Conrad sailed on. A short narration would accompany this. It could vary slightly for the British television transmission. The matter of keeping faith with the British unions came up, and Wajda proposed that the journey of the *Melita*, the old steamer which took Conrad from Singapore to Bangkok, could be usefully shot somewhere on a British location. Wajda also accepted Jolyon's suggestion that the opening scene, of Conrad leaving his old ship, could be re-shot as an exterior scene in Britain.

I quickly re-wrote the scene, introducing an old Indian messanger running after Conrad to deliver a parcel from his uncle in the Ukraine. It was decided that Mike would leave Warsaw before the end of the studio shooting to research British locations and organise things at that end.

Everybody was quite rightly praising Allan Starski for his composite cabin sets. They were beautifully designed and executed, except that apparently no one had bothered to explain to Allan what kind of a dramatic scheme was to operate there. It was essential to suggest Burns' oppressive, constant presence in the officers' quarters. He requests that the door of his cabin is to be kept open at all times, so that he can watch the young captain continuously. Every time Conrad goes in or out of his cabin, Burns is there. But Allan put a staircase at the opposite end of the saloon, leading out of the locker room which contained the medicine chest. Conrad could thus walk up on deck without ever passing by the open door of his First Mate's cabin, and very easily escape his morbid attentions. It took Allan and the carpenters half a day to seal that way out and transfer the staircase to the opposite side of the set, at the end of the corridor. It immediately seemed to create by itself the right claustrophobic effect, but also produced some cutting problems for David Naden. To cut directly from the stairs to Conrad coming out onto the deck would make him seem to emerge from the wrong direction.

We had barely cleared that obstacle when Jolyon and Mike were both struck by the observations that the set was anyway built the wrong way round. The thick column of the mast was coming down in the middle of the corridor, and its slant suggested that the saloon was forward of the corridor and the officers' sleeping quarters. Now everybody – well, almost everybody – knows that the officers' quarters are at the stern, with the saloon right at the back, under the poop. The mast was movable and the slant could be reversed, but then the captain in his chair opposite the saloon mirror sat with his back to the prow of the ship, and the stairs would seem to be coming out in the middle of the deck, while the exteriors clearly showed that entrance to be on the poop. We left the mast the way it had been placed originally, and were worried sick for a day, and then gradually forgot about the problem. But it did mean confusing the spatial relationships in the ship which we had hoped to make crystal clear.

Burns, in his cabin, looking through at Conrad's

The next shock for Michael and Jolyon was the discovery that the studio interiors were not going to be shot in synch. In Britain practically all the work is now done in synch, and there is a general belief among directors and actors alike that it gives the performances that mystical 'live' quality which gets irretrievably lost in post-synching. True or not, it means that few actors have had any experience of post-synching, and they naturally treat the process with great suspicion. In Poland, on the contrary, almost all the feature filming is done with a guide track only, out of both habit and the lack of properly blimped equipment. Indeed, on the set the sound people are often treated as a necessary evil, with the boom man chased all over the place, away from the edge of frame and the lights. The drawbacks of this system are quite obvious: the quality of sound in Polish films is generally not good. But, on the credit side, this camera tyranny ensures that film remains there a primarily visual medium.

Already on the Balchuk location Michael Darlow had been complaining loudly about shooting the interiors non-synch. The necessity had been explained there by the presence of loud generator noise. In Warsaw it was the badly blimped, and sometimes quite unblimped, Arriflex camera which was clattering so loudly that in some of the rushes it almost drowned the dialogue. Wajda supported Michael's protests, and an attempt was made by the camera crew to cushion the noise with a blanket. Later, a coloured scarf was occasionally tied under the zoom lens. It made the Arriflex look appealingly human, but the noise was still coming through.

David Naden and Mieczyslawa Kalisz, his Polish assistant, were hard at work assembling the Bulgarian rushes. Their quality was, on the whole, encouraging. There was some life and a romantic glow about them. But the coverage of the night squall scene, the climax of the film, looked rather thin.

Having absorbed all the shocks, we got down to some solid work. Wajda decided to clear the saloon takes first, and then move into the corridor and the cabins. We began with the long, difficult and important scene of Conrad's first meeting with the Mate. It opened with a mirror shot, with Conrad sitting in the captain's chair and watching his own reflection. 'Deep within the tarnished ormolu frame, in the hot half-light sifted through the awning, I saw my own face propped between my hands. And I stared back at myself with the perfect detachment of distance, rather with curiosity than with any other feeling, except for some sympathy for this latest representative of what for all intents and purposes was a dynasty; continuous not in blood, indeed, but in its experience, in its training, in its conception of duty, and in the blessed simplicity of its traditional point of view on life.' We spent some time talking about that passage of Conrad's and how to put it on the screen. At that time Wajda had not decided yet about using Conrad's voice over. There were photographs of bearded Victorian gentlemen ready to be put on walls as likenesses of past captains to be reflected in the mirror. In the end we agreed that it would make much too literal and illustrative an attempt to express Conrad's thoughts. We did a couple of takes of Conrad, seated in the captain's chair, playing about with his cap, posing in front of the mirror like a vain schoolboy, and growing suddenly serious as he catches in reflection a glimpse of Burns' weird figure emerging from the shadows in the corridor and moving in through the open door. Then the awkward introduction which had to be given in playing some meaning and dramatic shape. 'Let us go up. Please lead the way,' says Conrad, and Burns doesn't move or react in any way, continuing to watch the youngster warily. Conrad, embarassed, remembers that on board the captain always goes first, and with a blurted 'yes' marches out. It wasn't exactly what Conrad had written, but dramatically it seemed to work.

In the enclosed, intimate space of the Warsaw set Wajda's method of communal creative decision-making could at last come into its own. With other problems out of the way, the growing personal familiarity making communications easier, we could concentrate on the work. There were only three main actors left, they all knew their lines, and back in Albena the groundwork had been done in hours of rehearsing with Mike Darlow and in open script discussions. The restricted space inside the set could accommodate only the basic camera crew, the much

Ransome shaves Conrad in his cabin

put-upon boom man, Wajda, Mike and myself. Others were moving in and out, including Jolyon, while he was in Warsaw. The normal procedure was to try the scene first in dramatic terms, to get the theme, pace and dramatic shading feeling right. We did have a complete run through on the first day, working through the scenes in script order and exploring the dramatic possibilities of the set. But in lining up, the scene would be re-opened again, and any new ideas were considered. Once the action seemed to be working well, Sobocinski, who until then would be watching, perhaps coming in with an occasional comment, would select with Wajda an angle for the master shot, to record all, or most of the action. With this done, Sobocinski could proceed to arrange the lights. After the take, Wajda consulted Mike Darlow about the actors' interpretation of the text, but really everyone was free to offer opinion and criticism. If Mike thought the take could be improved in terms of performance, we would go again. When the master shot was in the can, we would line up for the close shots, first one way, then all the reverses.

The coverage was never extravagant, because with the Eastmancolour stock imported by Poland paid for in hard currency, stringent economies were in force. Officially the shooting ratio aimed at was 1:5, extraordinarily stingy by Western standards. I doubt if Wajda managed to keep within it, but it was still quite frugal.

It was rewarding to be involved in this stage of the filming. The open situation, with several people contributing to creative decisions, could remain advantageous only as long as Wajda's overall authority remained unquestioned. There was never any doubt about that. Though, inevitably, there were one or two cases when this democracy resulted in a certain confusion. There was, for instance, the case of a missing empty corner.

It was the continuation of Conrad's first day on board of the ship. The two officers come down from the deck inspection and enter the saloon again. This time Conrad prefers to leave the Captain's chair empty and sits in the corner of a plush-red settee, removing a violin case which has been lying there. He is questioning the Mate about the late Captain.

CONRAD: Had he been so very unlucky?
BURNS: No. The late Captain was not an unlucky man. One couldn't say that. But he had not seemed to want to make use of his luck.
CONRAD: (*quietly*):
Where did he die?
BURNS: In this saloon. Just where you are sitting now.

Burns says it aggressively, taking an obvious, crude pleasure in it. Conrad, controlling a sudden impulse to jump up – as the script and Joseph Conrad put it – sits it out for a few more seconds, continuing the conversation, before rising with feigned unconcern to move across to the captain's chair. Burns, suddenly freed of his reluctance to speak, is talking tensely about the old captain, avoiding Conrad's eyes and staring fixedly into the corner vacated by him. Conrad cannot help looking there as well. But the obvious, simple cut-away of the empty corner was never shot.

It is even difficult to remember why. Setting up for a wide shot there was some talk about that necessary cut-away. When Conrad moves across to the table the camera pans with him, losing the corner. Then, after Conrad's 'What was he like', the business with the violin case starts: Burns rises, picks up the case and empties its contents in front of the young captain. It was a long and fairly complex take and we were all engrossed in its detail. The angle was wrong for the cut-away of the empty corner, anyway. It needed a separate camera set up. But after the master shot we went in close, and the empty corner was somehow forgotten. On the screen the scene seems to work quite well, except for that omission. I feel a stab of embarrassment as Burns and Conrad stare at the spot which the audience, for some inexplicable reason, are never allowed to see.

It has occurred to me that one reason why we missed that cut-away was Wajda's lack of interest in it. Perhaps he had different private plans for that empty corner. Originally Wajda wanted an apparition of the dead

captain to appear there. He put it into the Polish shooting script and it even had a, mercifully, short span of life in the English one. In fact, if Wajda's natural impulses had been given free reign, the dead captain would have intruded at several places, with discordant screeching of his violin on the soundtrack whenever pressures on his successor become unbearable. I had always been strongly opposed to this, and on the set I had had support from several quarters: from Jolyon, Michael, Zbyszek Kaminski and Marek. We argued that the dead captain's presence on board would be all the stronger for not being physical, and that his appearance would clash with and seriously disrupt the formal unity of the film. Wajda stopped talking about it to the 'purists', but from fitful echoes in the production office I knew that the captain's ghost was taking a long time dying, and that its re-emergence was still possible even at the run-in.

Continuous work on the Warsaw set at last gave our three principal actors the chance to develop their performances. Graham Lines was sweating hard at it and, I thought, with impressive effect. He likes, and needs, a lot of patient rehearsing, especially when some energetic physical activity is involved. His natural stance is that of an immobile, intense concentration, but sometimes there seems to be a curious lack of rapport between his head and his limbs, as if his reflexes were somewhat defective. A request for some sudden, instinctive movement can throw his performance out of gear.

In the later part of that saloon scene Burns, who has been talking towards the empty corner, suddenly glares at Conrad resentfully.

BURNS: Yes! The captain died as near noon as possible. I read the service over him at sunset and then I stuck the ship's head north and brought her in here. I – brought – her – in!

As he utters the last words, with all the rancour of a man deprived of his rightful prize – the ship, Burns was supposed to raise his fist and bang them on top of the table that separates him from Conrad. But Graham's timing of that gesture was somehow wrong. We rehearsed this several times, and still could not get it quite right. Graham's hands must have been sore by then, because in the successive rehearsal he arrested their downward motion an inch from the top of the table, and rested them quietly on it. Wajda loved the effect, and so did everybody else. We went straight into a take; Graham's arrested action in it was not identical with that final rehearsal, but it was effective enough.

There was not always sufficient patience on the set to get each detail exactly right. A particularly bad case occurred in the final, mopping-up period, when Mike Darlow had already left us to organise the British locations. We were lining up an additional scene, devised in Albena as a fruitful compromise between Wajda, with his material ghost of the dead captain, and us, the 'purist' party on the crew. Conrad wakes up at night as if into another nightmare, with two quarrelsome voices reaching him across the corridor from the First Mate's open cabin. It is Burns arguing with the dead captain, imitating his voice and answering with his own.

BURNS (*in the Old Captain's snarling voice*):
So I am going out of this world, am I?

BURNS: Yes, sir. You haven't many days left in it. One can see it by your face.

BURNS (*as Old Captain*):
My face, eh? . . . Well, put the helm up and be damned to you . . . If I had my wish neither the ship nor any of you would ever reach a port. And I hope you won't.

Burns roars with a shrieking, sinister laughter. Suddenly he notices Conrad, seated awake on his bunk and staring. Not put out, Burns says to Conrad in a perfectly normal sounding voice.

BURNS: And his head was not gone then. He meant every word of it.

Graham Lines had this scene scrupulously rehearsed with Mike and played it well. But on the set Wajda asked him to do some business with his clawing hands, to emphasise the content and make the image even more grotesque. Graham tried, but it destroyed his coordination, especially as he had to raise his head at a precise angle at the same time. I stayed in Burns' cabin with Zbyszek Kaminski, rehearsing, trying to work out Graham's problems, while they were setting up the camera on the other side of Conrad's cabin, with its outer wall removed. Graham had got the business and the timing right at last, and I went with the good news to Andrzej, only to find that he was no longer interested. The camera had been set up with only Graham's arms in frame, and the head out of it.

It was the nearest I came on this project to blowing up. It should have been clear to everybody that at great physical and emotional cost to himself Graham Lines was producing the best thought out, the most coherent and complete, committed and sincere performance of the film. He deserved every bit of attention that he needed and claimed. Fortunately, Wajda backed down gracefully and the take was done properly.

Tom Wilkinson, on the other hand, was full of natural flair. His presence and force of personality were clear to see. The problem – if there was a problem – was in the uncertain definition of his part. He was encouraged by Wajda to put it all together by himself, with little help from any of us. He practically absconded from Mike Darlow's protective care and he became the first Englishman on the project to go 'native' with a vengeance. He mixed almost exclusively with the Poles and formed a friendship with Marek Kondrat. Their spontaneously inventive horse-play, with occasional dead-pan contributions from Witek Sobocinski, provided convulsive flashes of humorous relief, sometimes to the point of breaking up concentration on the set.

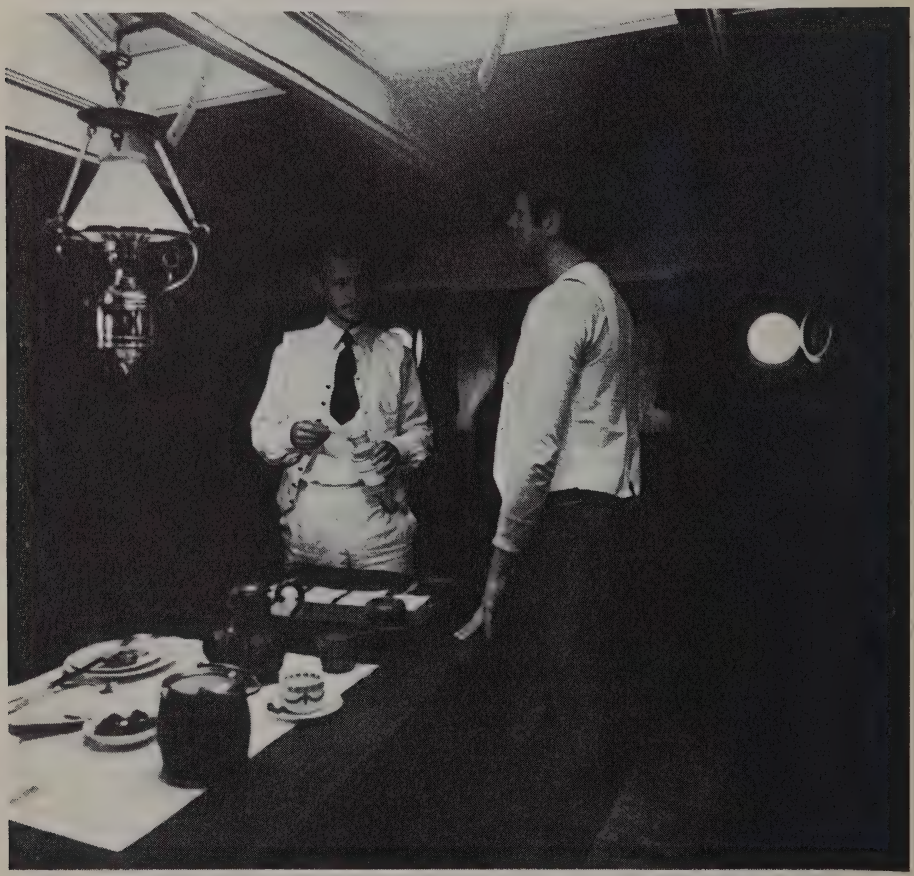
I think we were really all waiting for Tom's performance to happen, and Ransome to come alive in front of our eyes. That in some measure it did is a tribute to Tom Wilkinson's acting talent. But in the early scenes on the Warsaw set the vague outlines of his part and a lack of any dramatic content in his lines forced him to rely on rather irrelevant personal mannerisms. Later, when he got a couple of meaningful lines, he seized his chance brilliantly. Unfortunately, the key night scene in the saloon before the storm was marred by other weaknesses.

Somehow that scene was lined up and shot in some confusion. It

opens with Conrad writing in his diary. I thought it was important to quote from that diary as much as possible, to hint that here, perhaps, was a man for whom it was more natural to face an impending disaster with a pen in his hand than with action. Which is what Conrad himself is saying:

> 'There is something going on in the sky like a decomposition, like a corruption of the air, which remains as still as ever. After all, mere clouds, which may or may not hold wind or rain. Strange that it should trouble me so. I feel as if all my sins had found me out . . . What appals me most of all is that I shrink from going on deck to face it . . . From the mere vision. My first command. Now I understand that strange sense of insecurity in my past. I always suspected that I might be no good. And here is proof positive, I am shirking it, I am no good'.

In the finished film most of this passage is used as a voice over the previous, exterior scene, with the end sentences synchronised in the



Conrad and Ransome in the saloon

saloon. But originally it was decided to shoot it with Conrad saying the words in two versions, the Polish and the English. Then, having done it in Polish, it was decided to drop the other take, and leave the English to be subtitled or post-synchronised. More seriously, Wajda asked for actual tears from Marek, and pushing for more, got a wet, sobbing and sniffling impression of a self-pitying schoolboy. Ransome enters quietly and stops behind him. Conrad becomes suddenly aware of his presence and jumps up.

CONRAD: Somebody's dead!
RANSOME: Dead? Not that I know of, sir. I was in the forecastle ten minutes ago and there was no dead man there then.
CONRAD: You did give me a scare . . . How does it look outside?
RANSOME: Very black indeed, sir. There's something in it for certain.
CONRAD: In what quarter?
RANSOME: All round, sir.
CONRAD: All round, for certain.

He repeats it mechanically, and remains still. RANSOME walks around the table to face him, and leans into his face.

CONRAD: You think I ought to be on deck?
RANSOME (*forcefully*): I do, sir.

Tom played it quite beautifully, with urgency, a hint of intimate understanding, yet proper formality still retained. But the scene never quite recovers from a false emotional note it strikes with Conrad's crying. It is both foreign to the text, and to Marek Kondrat's particular style of acting, at its best when it is dry and incisive.

A curious tension was at the time developing between Marek and Wajda. It had always been understood that they belonged to different aesthetic camps, but Andrzej cast him in the part with full knowledge of that position, perhaps even because of that. He had, after all, intended to move away in this film from his usual preoccupations. But now, with most of the film in the can, he was plagued with doubts. He respected Marek's acting skill, but he was afraid that his screen personality might prove to lack some quality of warmth, of availability. And this at the time when Marek's performance was developing really well.

Marek Kondrat's English had come on by leaps and bounds. He was now able to speak it at any pace. It made him more relaxed and confident, and his performance increased in depth and fluency. That erratic spell on locations was now over. And he was taking direction well. In fact, his professional reflexes, the quickness and intelligence of his responses, were amazing.

Perhaps Wajda has a more romantic attitude to film-making than even he himself is aware of. Perhaps what he was really anxious about was that feeling Marek gives of always keeping a part of himself in reserve. In the sense in which Cybulski had been a 'generous' actor, and Tom Wilkinson appears to be 'generous', Marek Kondrat is a 'mean' actor. Acting is a craft for him, an acquired skill, not a complete way of

life, devouring all of his emotional resources. That doesn't make him on the screen either shallow or insincere.

What is perhaps Marek's best scene was shot at this time, on 17th and 18th November. It is Conrad's return to Singapore after his ordeal, and a meeting with Giles in a local restaurant. Wajda stuck to his idea of putting a ladies' band there, and for once I supported him against other 'purists'. There were perfectly valid dramatic excuses for this extravagance: Conrad, in his first few hours on shore, receives a full blast of 'life' with all of its crude attractions. But Wajda was developing it as very much a private joke. At the end of an austerely sexless film he

Return to Singapore: the ladies' band

wanted to assemble most of Warsaw's leading ladies as members of a travelling musical bordello. Wojciech Pszoniak, perhaps the most talented and versatile of the younger actors in Poland, who had given outstanding performances for Wajda in *The Wedding* and *The Land of Promise*, agreed to conduct.

It was great fun shooting it, although, inevitably, most of the scene, including the explicit sex gags – the phallic trombones, accosting at the tables, Lesbian innuendo – finished up on the cutting room floor. The idea of having two of the musicians speak in Polish had been dropped earlier. But as a background, glimpsed briefly in sound and vision, the ladies' band works well. Giles' table is away from all the bustle, and his conversation with Conrad has been shot simply.

Cigar smoke is drifting, diffusing the hot light. (Sobocinski had excelled himself. His lighting of the whole, large set was breathtakingly beautiful.) Conrad walks in, pushing his way through the watching throng. Giles picks him out at once, rises, and points his walking stick at him, shouting across the room, 'What's this I hear?! Twenty one days from Bangkok?'

After the initial exchange they fall silent for a few seconds and listen to the band playing a Polka pastiche. They pick up their conversation again when there is a break in the music.

GILES (*sagely*):
You must feel jolly well tired by this time.

CONRAD: No, not tired. But I'll tell you, Captain Giles, how I feel. I feel old. And I must be. All of you on shore look to me just a lot of skittish youngsters that have never known a care in the world.

GILES: That will pass. But you do look older – it's a fact.

CONRAD: Aha!

GILES: No! No! The truth is that one must not make too much of anything in life, good or bad.

CONRAD: Live at half speed. Not everyone can do that.

GILES: You'll be glad enough presently if you can keep going even at that rate. And there's another thing: a man should stand up to his bad luck, to his mistakes, to his conscience, and all that sort of thing. Why – what else would you have to fight against?

The band starts up again, playing a waltz, and CONRAD turns his eyes away from GILES. The old captain speaks abruptly.

GILES: Why – you aren't faint-hearted?

CONRAD (*searching for a sincere answer*):
God only knows, Captain Giles.

GILES (*reassured*):
That's all right. You will learn soon how not to be faint-hearted. A man has got to learn everything – and that's what so many of these youngsters don't understand.

CONRAD: Well, I am no longer a youngster.

GILES: No . . . Are you leaving soon?

CONRAD: I am going on board directly.

GILES (*approvingly*):
You will? That's the way. You'll do.

CONRAD (*slightly annoyed*):
What did you expect? That I would want to take a week ashore for a rest? There's no rest for me till she's out in the Indian Ocean, and not much of it even then.

GILES (*puffing at his pipe reflectively*):
Yes, that's what it amounts to . . . Precious little rest in life for anybody. Better not to think of it . . .'

The scene gives us a sense of a sudden growth in Conrad's spiritual stature. After those twenty-one days from Bangkok he has become a match – indeed, more than a match – for the wise old Giles. In the opening sequences of *The Shadow Line* Conrad is an impatient and arrogant youngster, unable to come to terms with himself, confronted by the untold, mysterious depths of knowledge in Giles. In this scene it is Giles who appears wholly exposed, with his genially patronising and didactic stoicism, and Conrad who suggests deep reserves of experience and wisdom. In one stroke he has gone beyond the stoicism of Giles.

Marek Kondrat's control and intelligent, subtle shading of his performance come into their own here. In this scene he has justified Wajda's early judgement in casting him, and disproved his later doubts.

Conclusion

The making of *The Shadow Line* did not end with the studio work in Warsaw, but my own involvement in the project was becoming marginal. I was not there when Michael Darlow, with Wajda and Sobocinski in attendance, directed British location scenes in Liverpool and in Scotland, or in Bangkok, where Sobocinski was in charge, with Wajda staying behind, and the irreplaceable, irrespressible Udi Eichler along to fix the natives. Then there were months of patient, skillful work in the cutting room with 'Goldfinger' David Naden – as Wajda had christened him. David has certainly left a considerable personal mark on this film, but his contribution lies outside the bounds of what is basically a first-hand, involved eye-witness report on this project.

By the late spring of 1976 it was all done, and the end-product, that celluloid thing, could start its separate existence. Now that it is out I find that I do not feel particularly possessive, protective or sentimental about it. It can fend for itself. Though it could do with some help from its official British parent. After spending some £70,000 on this co-production, Thames Television have been behaving as if they had a white elephant on their hands. Jolyon Wimhurst has been pushing it, of course, as hard as he can, but the official promotion has had a half-hearted and apologetic look.

The transmission went out on 1st July 1976. Popular response has apparently been rather good, and the critical reception somewhat mixed, from quite enthusiastic, through respectful, to downright bad. Most television critics seemed to be almost exclusively concerned with passing judgement on how well the film managed to transcribe the qualities of Conrad's prose. The faithfulness of this adaptation no doubt invited this approach, but surely it is a mistake to make of it an independent aesthetic criterion. No one would dream of judging an operatic performance of Gounod's *Faust* or Verdi's *Othello* simply by how congenial they seemed to Goethe's or Shakespeare's original texts. The distance between the medium of film and literature is certainly not any smaller. Received impulses are important, but what matters is whether the film achieves a cohesion, a life and an autonomy of its own.

This rambling and wayward report on a single project has not been concerned with the nature of the medium. But I don't believe it is irrelevant to that nature, either. Because film is not an organic creation, it does not issue directly from an individual imagination. It comes about as the result of a communal process of bewildering complexity.

The case I have described in these pages may seem extremely untypical. In fact, the meeting of different systems and cultures in a co-production situation only intensifies and exposes many standard elements. The tensions, the confrontations, the inter-related mass of creative, tactical and purely practical problems are basically always there.

The nearest analogy I can think of is the political process. As in politics a group of people sharing a common assumption initiate a

process which may end in a result very far removed from those assumptions. As in politics – or life – there is a great and apparently wasteful squandering of energy: until you realise that the process is no less important than the end. And as in politics, however democratic the system, there is, necessarily, a leader, and the style of leadership has something to do with the cohesion of the finished artefact.

I actually agree that film is a director's medium. *The Shadow Line* may prove to be an oddity in Andrzej Wajda's distinguished creative output, but it has his authority stamped all over it. Although, with a different set of collaborators, he would have made a very different kind of film. Because, to use the same analogy once again, a film director is concerned with relationships of power. He needs a political imagination and tactical acumen to marshal his resources, as well as a sharp sense of reality, assertiveness and a strong resolution. Last and not least, but certainly not first, come his artistic sensibilities.

Andrzej Wajda possesses such political talents to a high degree. He is, I suspect, aware of this strength and he derives a lot of ironic pleasure from playing this quasi-political game. For one who is involved in the process in a relatively subservient position, the enjoyment comes, perhaps, less naturally. But the capacity for it, for a generous response, is the essential prerequisite in any film-maker. And why hold back? After all, film-making, with its anxieties, contradictions, heart-breaks, personality clashes, disasters, rich absurdities, perplexing trivia and peaks of elation, is a remarkable imitation of life.

The Shadow Line

A co-production by Unit X of Film Polski and Thames Television
Adapted from *The Shadow Line* by Joseph Conrad

Screenplay	Boleslaw Sulik and Andrzej Wajda
Consultant	Dr Zdzislaw Najder
Director	Andrzej Wajda
English director	Michael Darlow
Assistant directors	Zorika Zarzycka, Zbigniew Kaminski, Krystyna Grochowicz, Magdalena Stelmaszczyk
Photography	Witold Sobocinski
Camera operator	Andrzej Jaroszewicz
Assistant	Bohdan Borowicz
Stills	Renata Pajchel
Music	Wojciech Kilar
Orchestra conductor	Konrad Bryzka
Additional music	Lech Branski
Music consultant	Anna Grabowska
Sets	Teresa Barska and Allan Starski
Assistants	Janusz Pol, Maciej Morski
Interiors	Maria Osiecka-Kuminek
Make-up	Halina Ber, Anna Adamek
Editors	David Nadan and Mieczyslawa Kalisz
Production	Barbara Pec-Slesicka

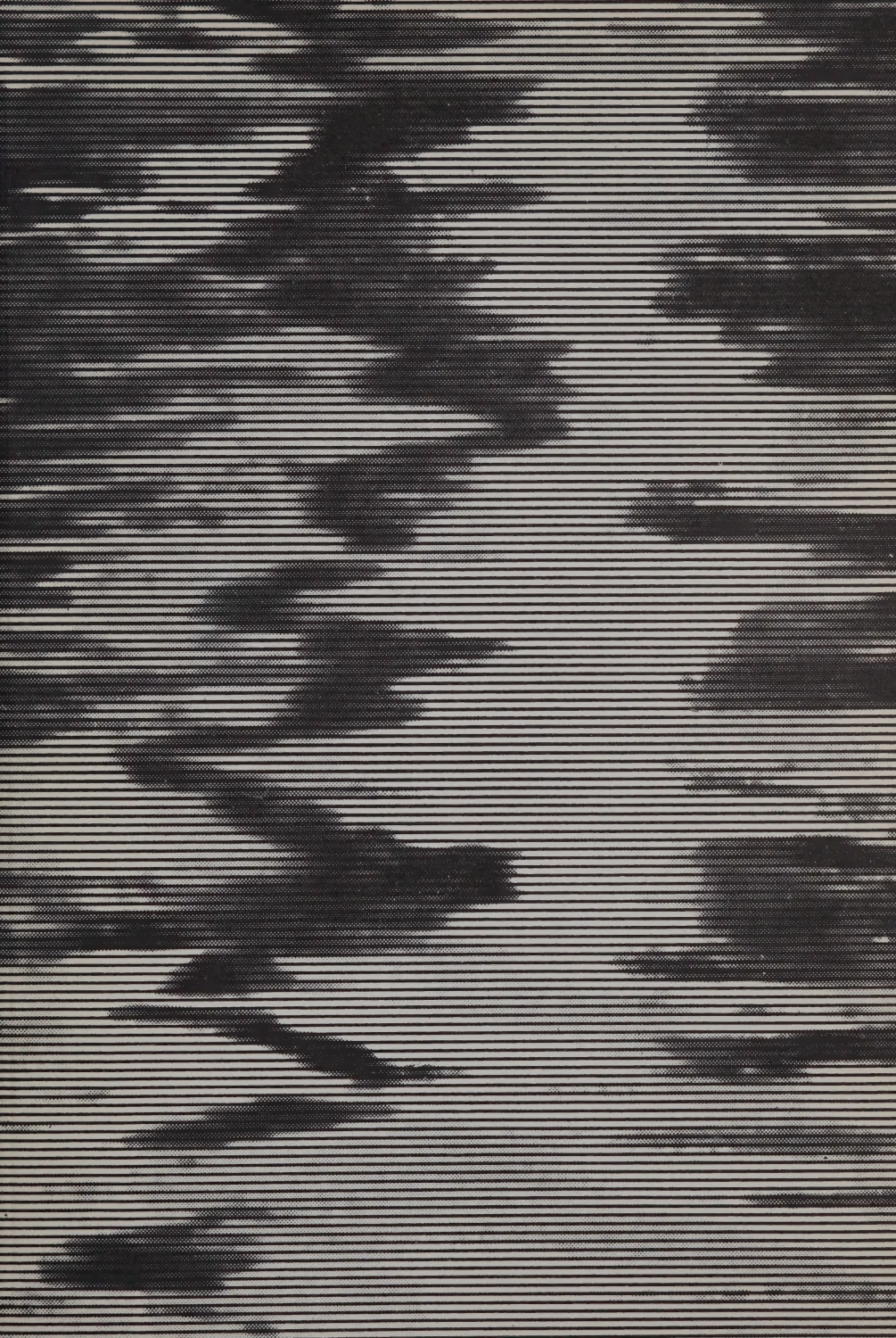
Production Assistants	Andrzej Smulski, Alina Klobukowska, Elzbieta Kozlowska, Waldemar Krol, Andrzej Swat, Janusz Dziumowicz
Bulgarian production manager	Nicola Welew
Thames Production	Jack Davison, Udi Eichler, Mike Fash, Alan James, Mimi Kimmins, Sandy Macrae, Robin Parker, Marilyn Vince, Vicky Woolfson, Pat Worth
Executive producer	Jolyon Wimhurst
Unit X artistic director	Andrzej Wajda
Literary director	Boleslaw Michalek

Cast

Marek Kondrat	Joseph Conrad
Graham Lines	Burns
Tom Wilkinson	Ransome
Bernard Archard	Capt. Ellis
John Bennett	Chief Steward
Martin Wyldeck	Capt. Giles
John Quentin	Hamilton
Richard Bartlett	Navy doctor
Piotr Cieslak	Second mate
Zygmunt Hübner	Captain of *Vidar*
Eugeniusz Priwiezencew	Frenchy
Gordon Richardson	Legation doctor
Stanislaw Tym	Jacobus
Jerzy Zelnik	Harbour office secretary

with Peter Cartwright, Geoffrey Collins, Geoffrey Hinsliff, Jeffrey Wickham, Marian Czyzewski, Stefan Friedman, Piotr Garlicki, Tadeusz Jastrzebowski, Krzysztof Kumor, Zygmunt Maciejewski, Tomasz Moscicki, Adam Perzyk, Radoslaw Piwowarski, Igor Sawin, Maciej Staniewicz

Eastman Colour. 3002 m. Transmitted on Independent Television 1st July 1976. Theatrical première September 1976 in Warsaw.



This is the story of a co-production between a British commercial television company, Thames, and the State-run film industry of Poland. Together they produced *The Shadow Line*, drawn from the semi-autobiographical work by Joseph Conrad and directed by the eminent Polish film-maker, Andrzej Wajda.

The book recounts the difficult negotiations involved in setting up the project, the many changes in the script and the complexities of shooting with both English and Polish actors on locations in Warsaw, Bangkok, Bulgaria and Liverpool.

The author, Boleslaw Sulik, is himself, as Conrad was, a Polish writer living in England. Besides writing the script for the film he was closely involved in liaison both in planning the project and on the set. He is thus well-placed to chart the cultural tensions which were added to the more usual problems of the film-making process.

NEW YORK ZOETROPE
31 EAST 12th / NEW YORK 10003

Price £1.25

British Film Institute